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A ROMANCE OF THE ILLINOIS.

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THE FOREST PRINCESS.

CHAPTER I.

A FOREST BEAUTY.

"Jest look-a-here, Mister Uriah Barham, Esquar, so fothe an' so on, it's time to stop, an' ef you don't begin makin' up your mind to do it afore long, I'll be dod-dinged an' everlastin'ly corn-spluttered into teetotal ruination, ef thar hain't agoin' to be jest the tallest kind of a muss, right here, afore we go a pesky step further; so thar, now, what ye goin' to do 'bout it, eh?" and the irate speaker angrily flung down his tattered slouch hat before his companion, planted the butt of his rifle with an emphatic *thud* upon the ground, and leaning his chin upon it, stared fixedly at the other's countenance.

The worthy whose long-winded expostulation is recorded above, was a tall, lank, but withal sinewy and muscular personage, who had not long passed his third decade. His dress was that usually worn by the frontiersman, about the beginning of the nineteenth century, consisting almost entirely of buck-skin, and besides the rifle alluded to, he bore a long knife and heavy steel hatchet.

The person addressed as Uriah Barham, was of nearly the same hight, but of a more symmetrical build, and in the picturesque suit of deer-skin, seemed a perfect model of masculine beauty. His features were handsome and regular; his long hair, mustache and beard were of a glossy blackness, fine and silken.

In place of the hatchet worn by his comrade, Uriah had a brace of single, brass-barreled pistols, that had upon more than one occasion performed signal service for their master. Just now a slightly vexed expression overspread his features, and a resolute light filled his full black eyes.

"Be ye deaf, consarn ye, that you cain't speak?" continued

the first hunter, protruding his chin, and extending his legs so far apart, that he resembled an inverted letter Λ . "Oh, you needn't snap your eyes an' try to pitch your eyebrows clean over the top o' your head, 'ca'se you cain't skeer me that a-way. No, sirree! I don't skeer wuth a cent! Pete Shafer ain't that kind o' boy, *he* ain't! Old Georgy—Washin'ton, you know—used to say to me—

"No, that's a durned lie, an' I'm in dead sober airnest, now. I say that it's time to stop—d'ye mind *that*, now? I say you shain't go no further a'ter that pesky little witch—I mean angel—ef *I* kin holp it. Don't look crossways at me; it's dangerous, *it* is. I went through a feller onc't fer less 'n that. Didn't need no fun'ral, *that* feller didn't. Come 'long past the spot one time, 'bout a year a'terward, an' thar was the dog-gondest sight you ever *did* see. Every dod-blamed piece as big 's a hazlenut, hed tuck root an' was a-growin' up, all a-cussin' at me like blue blazes. I lit out o' thar in a hurry, *I* did, bet yer life, I did!

"Hold on, thar, cain't you, let me talk a little? Best tie up that pesky tongue o' your'n, 'Riah, boy, or it 'll git you inter trouble, some o' these 'ere days. When you start I cain't git in a word aidgeways," vociferated Shafer, as his companion opened his lips to speak.

"No, *sir*, you mought jest as well knock under fust as last, 'ca'se you cain't go no further *this* a-way. Ef you was the daddy o' the sun, an' the great-gran'mother of the moon, I'd say the same. You'll git captervated, you will, an' killed a dozent times over; I know it! Ax me to pull up this 'ere tree by the roots—to swaller my head, or to ketch holt o' the seat o' my trowserloons an' lift myself up inter the air, an' then shake tell you kin hear the bones rattle an' my toenails drap off, an' I'll do it. Ef I don't, then 'tain't no matter! But I won't go nary step further—not a step!" declared Shafer, solemnly shaking his head to and fro, ending by abruptly sitting down.

"You're a fool, Pete," impatiently exclaimed Barham, as the other scout ceased for sheer want of breath, "and don't know what you are talking about. What are we out here for?"

"It hain't to be taggin' a'ter every petticoat we see, jest 'ca'se they happen to hev a gal inside of 'em, anyhow," retorted Shafer.

"And who is doing that?" demanded the young scout, a flush crimsoning his cheek.

"Ef I hed a lookin'-glass here, I'd interduce ye, but bein' as I hain't no sech thing, his name is 'Uri' Barham," sarcastically responded Pete.

"You've got so used to lying, Pete, that you can't talk straight if you try. I only want to find out where that party were going. Come on; we have no time to spend fooling here."

"Won't do it, I tell you. Cain't fool *me*, nary time. I see'd you was struck by them blue eyes an' them ar' slick ankles. You want to see her ag'in an' git both our skelps token, *that's* what you're a'ter. See here, stop—stop, I say! You, 'Riah!" yelled Shafer, as his comrade strode past him.

"Come along, then; I won't wait any longer," impatiently answered Barham.

"I won't, nor you shan't, nuther, so—I tell you, *come back!*"

But Uriah turned and strode rapidly along, not heeding the summons. Shafer sprung abruptly to his feet, and grasping his hat took a step in advance, adding, as a clineher:

"Look-a-here—s-a-y!" and then as the scout turned around, he continued in an impressive tone. "Ef you don't come right straight back an' 'have yourself, I'll tell on you; ef I don't, hope I may never see the back o' my neck! Come back! I'll tell Miry on you; *I'll* tell her how you're a-cuttin' up, jest 'ca'se she ain't here to watch you. Thar, now, ain't you 'fraid? won't you come back?"

"No!"

"All right then, I'll go too. I wanted you to keep on, all the time, but you're so dashed contrary, that I knowed you would back out ef I didn't tease you to stop," placidly remarked Shafer, as he overtook his comrade. "Didn't you know I's only foolin', 'Riah? Fact is, *I* want to see her ag'in, *myself*."

"Pete, if the Indians don't make an end of you, that habit of lying will be your death! I half expect, every time I see your mouth open, that one of them will choke you."

"Lord, boy, I'm *used* to 'em," responded Shafer.

"Luckily for us both that we let them get such a start of

us, or that infernal screeching of yours would have brought the whole kit down on us. You're old enough to know better, Pete," admonished Barham.

"That's so; I didn't think! But I won't do it no more. Hurry up, man; you don't walk *half* fast enough! I want to see that little critter ag'in. *Wasn't* she purty, though!"

"Nonsense! hold your tongue and get out of the way," impatiently interrupted Barham, and then they proceeded rapidly along the plainly-defined trail.

A few words will suffice to explain the presence of the two scouts here, so far from the settlements of their own race, and also the object that originated the dispute just recorded.

They were two of a number of scouts who had been detailed by General Samuel Hopkins, to spy out the movements of the Indians; to learn their number, and if possible their plans and the points against which they would first move.

The long-threatened outbreak had fairly begun, and although no important struggle had as yet taken place, it could not be far distant, and it was the policy of those in command to keep well posted regarding the movements of their red-skinned enemies. This duty, as a matter of course, had devolved upon that class of men whom history barely mentions, although their service is the most important and dangerous, and to whose brave daring move than one of those "heroes crowned with glory," owe their laurels.

To such of our readers who have previously made the acquaintance of the two scouts, [See Beadle's Dime Novel No. 222, "The Mad Ranger,"] a few words may be necessary to explain how it is we again meet them thus far from their homes, as well as the fair ones with whom they had come to such an excellent understanding.

Uriah Barham divided his time about equally between his father's house and Vincennes, where lived Myra Mordaunt, who had promised to marry the man who had braved so much for her, when the period of mourning for her mother's death should have expired. He, together with the other settlers, fondly anticipated a long and happy time of peace, since the signal defeat of the Prophet's army at Tippecanoe, on the 7th of November, 1811, but they were sadly deceived.

The savages soon began to ravage the country bordering upon the Wabash, principally on the Illinois side, and in April, 1812, a sudden swoop was made toward Vincennes, and three families butchered, almost in view of the town.

This incident aroused Barham, and he resolved to once more take the field, feeling that now, if ever, his skill and experience were needed. He called upon his old chum and fellow-scout, Pete Shafer, and together they sallied forth to the men then raising an army to put down the anticipated outbreak.

Joining General Hopkins—a brave veteran of the Revolutionary war—they were ordered to scout along through the troubled country and glean whatever information they could regarding the number of inhabitants and location of the Indian towns, as he had sworn to destroy every settlement of the savages along the Wabash river and Illinois border.

Of their adventures and travels we need not enter into detail, but pass on to the evening of that day on which Pete Shafer uttered his eloquent peroration as recorded at the head of this chapter.

They had been scouting along the banks of a deep creek, and had just reached a sort of defile that led through the range of hills, when their ever-attentive ears heard the afar-off rattle of horses' hoofs upon the rocky trail. One moment told them that the horsemen, whoever they might chance to be, were coming through the defile, directly toward them.

The two scouts had not much time for deliberation, but it was amply long enough for them to decide that the quicker they sought cover the better it would be for their healths, as it was not likely the strangers were other than Indians; which was equivalent to *enemies*, for although as yet there were several tribes who *professed* to be peaceful, a chance to lessen the number of the hated pale-faces would scarcely be overlooked, if not attended by too much danger.

Knowing this, the white men sprung from rock to rock, to avoid leaving a plain trail, and snugly ensconced themselves in a dense clump of bushes that grew upon the hillside, some few yards above the defile, and prepared to take a good scouting of the travelers, whoever they might chance to be. Not one thought was given to the risk they might be running.

The sound of hoof-strokes grew rapidly more distinct, and it was evident that the party contained a goodly number, who apparently did not give a thought to the danger of an ambush, or of foes, for not a scout was thrown out. This fact, more than aught else, convinced the hunters that it was a friendly party; or at least not composed of Indians upon the war-path.

Presently the foremost rider—a tall, stalwart savage, whose plumed and braided scalp-lock was silvery gray, and whose broad, naked breast gave evidence to his fame as a warrior in more than one deep scar—appeared at the mouth of the defile. But this personage only received a brief glance from the scouts.

All their attention was riveted upon a figure that rode close behind the Indian chief, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that Barham repressed an exclamation of wonder and admiration. And truly it was no great wonder that he felt surprised.

The second figure was that of a woman—or a girl, for she seemed not more in age—but that woman was of the same blood as himself—a white, and yet evidently not a captive.

The two leading persons paused at the creek to water their thirsty animals, and thus being in full view of the concealed hunters, they were subjected to a close and keen scrutiny.

The woman appeared to be about seventeen or eighteen years of age, and was gloriously beautiful, with a wealth of dark-brown hair floating about her neck and shoulders, large, deeply-blue eyes that roved curiously around her, half-veiled beneath their richly-fringed lashes; eyes that could apparently send forth spirited flashes, or more correctly, mischievous glances, and again deep and melting, as the mood swayed her.

The bloom of health was upon her cheek, that the sun's hot rays had scarcely touched, and with the slightest emotion would deepen into the richest carnation. Her red, ripe lips were slightly parted, affording a glimpse of small, even teeth, glistening like pearls; her nose straight and well-formed; her chin softly rounded, without destroying the almost perfect oval of the countenance.

Her head was gracefully set upon her white neck, her shoulders had such a charming slope, her figure—though some-

what full for her age—was so symmetrical, and there was already such fullness in the bust, and such robust plumpness in the finely-formed arms, that no wonder the two scouts gazed eagerly and admiringly at her as she sat so gracefully upon her small, jet-black horse.

She was not tall, scarcely of the medium stature; and yet she was one of those specimens of the fair sex who, no matter to what class or grade they belong, command attention by their natural elegance and beauty. And her garb, though fitted for the wild life she seemed living, showed all these charms to advantage, with what might seem a tinge of coquetry.

Then the party slowly rode on—crossed the creek and disappeared into the forest-depths beyond, leaving two strangely-bewildered and astonished scouts behind them. For some minutes neither of them spoke, but crouched motionless, staring vacantly at the spot where the woodland beauty had vanished.

"Say, 'Riah," at length broke forth Shafer, "did you see it? Jest poke me in the short ribs—stick a pin into me and wiggle it around! pull my smeller, or 'less step onto my tendermost corn—I don't care a darn which; any thin' to wake me. I'll be corn-splattered ef he ain't asleep! 'N' so'm I! that's the hull thing. Say, you, 'Riah! wake up—did you see any thin', I say?"

Barham gave a start and glanced around at his excited companion, nodding his head.

"What was it—what did it look like?"

"A woman—the loveliest creature I ever saw!" warmly cried the young scout.

"Prittyer'n Lucy—or Mary?"

"Yes!"

"Look-a-here, Uriah Barham, you're lyin'—that's what's the matter! You've bin asleep and dreamt it all—I know it—an' so did I!" solemnly affirmed Shafer, shaking his head and puckering up his lips. "I tell you you didn't see a turned thing! It's all a mistake. Thar wasn't no gal, nor no Injuns, nor no nothin'. 'Twas a *sperret*!"

"Nonsense, man, I saw her as plain as I see you now, and look! there you can see the tracks of her horse's feet."

"Don't b'lieve no sich a thing! You can't fool *me*. Sech critters as she is don't leave no horse's tracks ahind 'em; it was a *sperret*, I tell you—a *spook*!" declared Pete, with as much earnestness as though he actually believed the assertion.

"You're crazy, Pete. Bah! a *spook*—why, man, she looked so sweet that I can almost taste it now!" muttered Barham; then adding, more naturally, "Come, Pete, let's go."

"Go whar?"

"Why, follow on after them, of course."

"No you don't, my covey! Cain't cotch old Pete that a-way; not ef he knows hisself, which I rayther think he does, slightually. Durned ef I go ary step; hope may die 'f I do! Nor you shain't, nuther. 'Tain't healthy runnin' arter them kind of critters, *it* ain't. I know all 'bout 'em," vaguely affirmed Pete, shaking his head ominously.

"Come on, I say; what're you afraid of, anyhow? Not the girl, surely, and we can keep clear of the red-skins. What's got into you, anyhow, Pete?" impatiently interrupted Barham.

"'Tain't in me—it's *you* that is tuck. Oh, I know all the simpletons; can't fool *me*, not a tall, nary time. I've see'd too much on it afore now. Lost my hull comp'ny that a-way, when I was capt'in in the army. Let me see. 'Twas jest afore—ur—yas, durned ef it *wa'n't*, too, jest afore Lord Bungwallis whipped the red-coats at—I forget the name o' the place, but its on the map, 'ca'se I've see'd it—that it all happened.

"I hed a cump'ny o' well-nigh a hundred men, all young likely fellows like myself what hed quit sparkin' thar gals to go 'fend thar kentry, an' o' course, fond as all git out o' a pettycoat, pervidin' thar was somethin' hugable inside it to make it look better. Night a'ter night thar'd turn up one feller less, reg'lar, till I got down to a corp'ral's guard, an' nobody could tell whar on airth the fellers had all gone to. We s'arched an' s'arched in vain, an' still the men kep' a-goin' like hot cakes, one a'ter the other, till I was left all alone in my *g*lory.

"I felt powerful bad, as you kin mebbe guess, when one night I was out walkin' for my health, when I saw a gal

comin' tordst me. I tuck a good squint at her mug, an' hope may die ef she wan't jest the dod-burnedest, purtiest bit o' female splendidness that I ever sot eyes on. She spoke to me, an' I felt like I was in a bee-gum whar the bees hed all swarmed away, a-lickin' honey! Ef I didn't then I wouldn't say so!

"Wal, I won't tell you all 'at we said, 'Riah, 'ca'se you're too young yit to think o' sech matters, but fin'ly I up an' smacked her right on the kisser. Then I see'd sights, *I* did, now you jist bet your life I did! *Then* I see'd what war up, an' found out whar all my men hed gone to! The pesky thing warn't contented, *she* warn't, but wanted the hull hog. But she didn't git it *that* time, 'ca'se I war too many fer her.

"Wal, sir, don't you b'lieve that jest as I kissed her, the 'tarnal thing turned right inter *the* old feller hisself, hoofs, horns and all, an' tried to kerry me off? He—*she* did, by golly! But I wiggled loose an' then I let 'im hev it, right bang in the snoot, a orful paster, now I tell you! Lord, 'Riah, you'd jest orter 'a' heerd that 'ere feller grunt when he felt 'em! Then he up an' grabbed his forked tail an' fotched me a swipe over the smeller—that's what makes it so crooked—an' then we clinched.

"Over an' over the ground we rolled, fust one atop an' then the other, a-bitin' an' a-gougin' like all git out. It was nip an' tuck, an' we got awful hot, now *I* tell you! Purty soon we rolled over into the creek, an' honest Injun! I e'ena'most scalded to death afore I got out ag'in. 'Ca'se why, he was so red hot. He tried to run, but my mad was up an' I pelted him like a drum. He tried to break loose, but I held him fast, an' then what d'ye think he did? Gi'n up?

"Wal, sir, so help me John Henery! ef he didn't sot up a squeel an' jest *turned hisself wrong side out!* In co'se I let go, fer wasn't he jest like a ball o' red-hot fire? Then he gi'n a yell, an' the last *I* see'd o' him he war a skootin' through the air fer all the world like a shootin' star, with a tail o' sparks wuss'n a comick!" concluded Shafer.

"What a lie! But what has that to do with following after the Indians?" impatiently responded Uriah.

"Jest this 'ere. *That* gal an' *this* gal is the same critter—so thar!"

"Bah!"

"Jest so, but it's the truth, anyhow. I tell you, 'Riah Barham, ef you foller that critter, you'll be sarved jest the same way my men was. Now you mark my word ef 'tain't so," earnestly added Pete Shafer.

"You can do just as you like, Pete, but I'm going on," and the younger scout began descending the hill with decisive steps, while Shafer stared after him with an air of ludicrous dismay.

"Wal, wal, ef I don't actilly b'lieve that 'ere pesky feller thinks I was a-lyin' all the time!" muttered Pete, as he gazed after his comrade. "Say, 'Riah, be ye goin' fer shore?"

"Yes."

"Good-by then."

But as Barham crossed the creek, Shafer again called out.

"Say, *you*, stop a minnit; I want to tell you somethin'," and as the other paused, Pete ran down the hill and joined him. "Now tell me—honest Injun, so help you John Henery—be you railly an' truly goin'?"

"Yes, I am."

"Wal, then, *so'm I!*" and the two scouts strode rapidly along the broad and plainly-defined trail.

They steadily followed it through all its windings until nearly night, eating a mouthful as they journeyed on, until Pete put in his second protest, as recorded at the head of this chapter. Once more overruled by his headstrong comrade, Shafer gave up the attempt as a bad job, and entered upon the quest with all his heart.

Thus they pushed on until nightfall, and then paused, wearied and jaded with their long and arduous tramp, apparently no nearer the object of their toiling than at the first step, even if they had not been distanced. Carefully concealing their trail where they left the path, the two scouts sought a secure covert, and laid down to rest, after eating a bit of parched corn and dried meat, with the intention of resuming the pursuit at the first dawn of day.

CHAPTER II.

AT BAY!

THE eastern horizon had scarcely begun to pale before the coming rays of the sun, when the two scouts awoke from their slumber, fresh and ready for another day of steady toil, like that which had just passed. Neither proposed to delay their journey by preparing a regular meal, and hastily munched a handful of parched corn and dried venison taken from their "possible sacks."

Shafer appeared unusually down in the mouth and out of sorts, for him, and every now and then he would pause and solemnly wag his long head to and fro, uttering a queer, non-descript sighing snort, while a look of wild horror glimmered in his pale, watery blue eyes.

"Thunder and blazes, Pete," exclaimed Barham, after an unusually loud and long-drawn explosion, glancing up curiously. "What's the matter with you? You grunt worse than a mule with the wind colic!"

"'Riah," lugubriously uttered Shafer, with a countenance that corresponded with his speech, "I dreamt a dream, las' night!"

"So did I, but it didn't affect me so bad as all that comes to. Come, you ain't going to be sick, are you?" he added, somewhat anxiously.

"No, 'tain't me—it's *you*. I dreamt about you—you an' that she-critter we see'd yest'day. 'Riah, I tell you now, fer shore, you'd best gi'n up the idee o' findin' any thin' more out about this 'ere gal. Won't you go back?"

"No, I've started to find out who she is, and you know me well enough, Pete, to feel sure that if I fail, it won't be because I didn't try all I knew how. But your dream—what was it?"

"You won't get skeered an' run away? then here goes," began Shafer, deliberately, clearing his throat. "I don't know

jestly how it begun, 'ca'se I didn't begin at it as ef it was a good squar' dream. I begun sorter in the middle, like.

"Wal, we was som'ers, I didn't jestly know whar, but you was on the level an' I was a-top o' a gre't tall rock that 'peared to be kivered knee-deep with melted glue, though what on airth melted it up, I couldn't for the life o' me see; anyhow thar it was, and thar I was, likeways.

"You was a-standin' still an' a-gawpin' with both eyes an' mouth wide open, at a female critter thet I knowed in a minnit was that *spook*, who was sorter—sorter mustardizing you, like, a-wavin' her little hands afore your noggin like the flop-pin' wings o' a big 'skeeter. When she'd mustard you a plenty to suit the 'casion, she jest gi'n a little hop up inter the air, an' dog my 'tarnal cats ef you didn't up and do the very identickle thing!

"The spook was jest about two feet above you, an' you was about half thet fur 'from the ground, when I see'd the red bleeze o' a fire start up under your karkidge. I tried to holler an' run to help ye, but as my feet was fast, I sot over back'ards, which made me tighter'n when I went courtin' Siny Sweeny an' sot down on a gob o' the old man's shoe-makin'-wax. I tried awful to git loose, but the glue helt the trowsers, an' the britches helt *me*—so thar I was, an' the fire a-bleezin' up funder an' funder aneath your feet.

"But Lord, 'Riah, you didn't 'pear to mind it a mite—not a corn-spluttered bit. Not you—the smilin' spook a-floatin' in the air over your head tuck all the 'tention *you* hed to spar'. Your moccasins beganed to smoke, and your britches to curl up like a 'possum in a dog's mouth, but you didn't screech. Then she—the spook, ye know—*she* put the cap-sheaf on top o' all!

"You mought guess till the sun turned to a snowball, an' you'd never hit it. What *she* did, I mean. Wal, sir, true as you live an set thar this very minnit, a gre't big ladle growed right out o' her hand, an' thar *she* was a-pourin' honey all over ye! Fact, by golly! Ef it wasn't, then I wouldn't say so.

"The fire was a-makin' you sizzle like, an' she kep' a-sorter swimmin' all around ye, an' you—'stead o' hollerin' like a white man hed orter—you kep' a-turnin' as *she* did, a-holdin' up your head *al* a-makin' sheep's eyes at her, an' a-lickin'

your chops like as ef the honey tasted good ! She kep' a-singin' sorter low an' soft like, an a-pourin' on the honey like fun, an' thar I sot, a-tryin' my durndest to slip outen them 'ar dod-bu'sted britches !

"The fire bleezed up higher ; you quit a-lickin' the honey an' sorter *scrootched* ; she up an' lent you a rip-snorter over the noggin with the ladle ; I give a big yell, slipped outen my britches an' skooted down the hill an'—waked up jest a-sweatin' !"

Barham could control his mirth no longer, and burst out into a fit of hearty but silent laughter, at the solemnly-ludicrous looks and tone of Shafer, who appeared not a little miffed at the reception of his terrible dream.

"Laugh on, ef you want to, 'Riah Barham ; snicker away while ye kin. Mebbe the laugh 'll be out o' the other side o' your mouth afore long. I tell you that ar' dream *meant something* !"

"Oh, Pete !"

"Jest so. Mebbe you'll say 'at I'm only a-lyin' *now*—be jest like ye ! You'll see what you'll see yit, ef you live long enough. Bet ye a dollar it'll all come true yit !"

"What ! my roasting over a slow fire and being basted with honey, and you losing your—" began the young ranger, when he was interrupted by Shafer.

"No, you looney, not *that*, but the *meanin'* of it all."

"And the meaning of it is—what ?"

"That you'll git inter hot water with that 'ere gal-spook—which means that you'll marry her : 'mount to the same thing, anyhow, the hot water does."

"And you ?"

"I'm in the same pernicklement. The *glue* means 'at I'll git a wife as 'll stick to me tighter'n a woodtick, an' she'll be boss ; which splains an' makes cl'ar my losin' my britchaloons. I tell you, 'Riah, that the sooner we turn back an' wipe out all mem'ry o' that—that what-d'ye-call her—the better it'll be for both on us. It'll be the ruination of us, shore, an' then think o' Lucy an' Miry ! What'd *they* do, the poor, innercent critters ?"

"That's too thin, Pete ; I see what you're up to, but it won't work. I'm going after her if I have to go alone,"

retorted Barham, decisively, rising and tightening his belt preparatory for a start.

"So'm I, then. 'Ca'se ef I *don't* go, thar won't be nobody to holler out an' skeer the pesky critter away, and which you'd be done brown for shore, then. But you mark my words: that 'ere dream *means* somethin'! This is bound to be jest the *toughest* time you *ever* see'd!"

"Nonsense—come along and stop your fooling," was Barham's only reply.

Shafer followed the lead of his headstrong comrade, but, it was with an ill-grace, and wearing a dogged look of anxiety that was by no means usual, upon his quizzical face. Evidently he attached considerable importance to his ridiculous dream, but more than once during the coming days did the minds of both revert to the meaning of the fantastic vision, as rendered by Peter Shafer.

The two scouts, in the very hight of strength and activity, pursued the trail at a rapid, steady pace that seemed enough to tire down a horse, without seemingly being affected in the least. The rough, hard life that they had led for the past few years had admirably fitted them for such work, rendering them fit to fight—or *run*—for a kingdom.

Near the middle of the forenoon, as they had nearly crossed a level plain of a couple miles' extent—one whose length had forbade the idea of skirting it—an incident occurred that seemed a forerunner of the dangers Shafer had predicted as attendant upon the expedition. They were just turning a point in the prairie, where the wood extended out into it like a promontory, when the younger scout, who was in advance, suddenly paused and exclaimed:

"Indians!"

"Right, by thunder!" echoed Pete, and then with one impulse they strove to dodge back out of sight.

But the fates seemed against them. Upon the prairie before them, and as near to the timber as they were, were several red-skins, who caught sight of our heroes at nearly the same instant, and sent up a wild yell of mingled surprise and triumph.

The scouts turned toward the woods, hoping to gain the advantage of cover, but they were abruptly turned from this

course. An answering yell pealed forth from the forest, and their well-trained eyes detected a number of dusky forms flitting from tree to tree, and rapidly nearing them.

There could be no doubt of their intentions, for one of those upon the open ground raised his rifle and discharged it at the scouts, who plainly heard the wicked whistle of the ragged bullet as it passed between them. Only for a moment they paused in hesitation; their experience in wild life had taught them to act as if by instinct.

"Run for it, Pete!" cried Barham. "Back to the hills!"

"Yas, but—" and Shafer's sentence was completed by his taking a quick, deadly aim at the savage who had fired at them.

He was not a man to throw away a shot, and the wild, shrill yell of agony that followed the report like an echo, told that the enemy numbered one brave the less—that the struggle was fairly inaugurated.

Barham did not fire, as the Indians dropped to the ground or sought cover behind trees, and there was no time to be lost. Then the two white men turned and fled over the hard, firm prairie with the speed of chased deer.

A series of short, quick yells told them that the enemy were upon the track, and then the chase swept on. Two miles of dead level, and but little more than one hundred yards the start.

Across this two miles the chase must lead, and then a chain of rocky, uneven hills would be reached, where the white men believed they would have a fair chance to beat off their assailants, or else baffle them among the deep, intricate ravines and gullies.

The hooting savages discharged one rattling volley after the fugitives as they turned to dart away over the plain, but in such haste that nearly every missile sped wide of its mark. Shafer gave a leap something longer than usual but did not falter.

That was all—a slight "crease," along his shoulder, and it acted as a spur does to a jaded horse. And then yard after yard the level ground was traversed by the pursued and pursuers, their relative positions remaining nearly the same.

The scouts, knowing how vitally important was every

moment gained in this trial, strained every nerve to the utmost tension, and were slowly gaining upon the savages. How they would succeed in a long race, requiring both speed and endurance, was another thing.

But one-half score of minutes sufficed to bring the scouts to the edge of the broken ground. For some little distance from the hill regular, the plain was thickly strewn with bowlders of various sizes and shapes, amid which the two men now plunged.

During the "tail on end" chase, Shafer had not attempted to reload his rifle, fearing to thus lose valuable time. But now such headlong speed would be dangerous, if not impossible, and as he dodged adroitly through the wilderness of rocks, that seemed as if some giant had cast them hither and yon in terrible play, he speedily performed this delicate operation to his own satisfaction.

"Up the hill, Pete—to the right, quick, before they have time to reload!" shouted Barham, pantingly, as the base of the hill was reached.

The savages for the most part pressed on hotly after the fleet-footed scouts, evidently hoping to close in upon them before they could find a spot suitable for standing at bay, where their capture or death would be an easy matter; but others slackened up and began to hastily reload their rifles.

They saw now the error they had fallen into in firing at the fugitives at first. Otherwise, it would have been an easy matter for them to have picked off one or both of the scouts, who were now fully exposed to view while scrambling up the steep hillside.

Barham, slightly in advance of Peter, gained the crest of the ridge and paused abruptly with a cry of dismay. The hill ended in an abrupt precipice that was fully a hundred feet deep ere the slope was again resumed.

They were cut off in that direction—in the rear were the bloodthirsty, yelling savages to check their progress in that way. Only one course was left for them, that of following along the ridge.

Barham led the way with powerful leaps, and Shafer closely followed, casting an occasional vicious glance over his shoulder at their exultant enemies, with a fierce glitter in his steely

eyes, that boded them no good did it eventually come to a hand-to-hand struggle for life. Another cry broke from the lips of the foremost ranger.

A cry, but not of despair as had been the first. A cry of joy—of exultation, that announced some discovery of importance.

Pete did not need to ask what called it forth, for his eyes had also noted the object that had caused the exclamation. And yet it seemed a little thing to cause the deep joy it had evidently inspired.

The two scouts had gained the extreme summit of the hill, that here arose like the blunted apex of a cone. Placed like a crown upon the gigantic head were two large boulders of oblong form, and fully as high as a man's head.

They were long and thick, and placed end to end so as to almost touch each other, and open upon the inside. That is, on the side next to the precipice, they inclosed a space of some ten feet long by half that width, thus forming a snug little fort with bullet-proof breastworks.

The scouts had seen all this at a glance, and resolved to make a stand there. Though they could hardly hope for success against their foes, who numbered nearly a score, the white men knew that it was their only chance.

Did they continue on and attempt to escape by flight, death or capture was inevitable, owing to their ignorance of the surrounding country, while it was but natural to suppose that the Indians were well acquainted with it, every yard.

"In with you, 'Riah," cried Shafer, eagerly, "an' keep 'em back. Here's my gun, too!"

It was no time to hesitate or to ask questions, and the young ranger knew that Pete, however whimsical and blundering he might be in time of security, was not one to run a needless risk, and he sprung lightly over the barricade, holding both rifles.

The Indians did not pause, but continued rushing up the hill as if to carry the fort by storm. They were in full view, and did not attempt to cover their approach in the least.

Barham quickly covered one of the dusky forms with his rifle, and pulled trigger. A shrill cry attested how accurate was his aim, and the leading savage threw up his arms and fell backward with a bullet-pierced brain.

Meanwhile Pete Shafer was not idle. His ready wit had comprehended that in attempting to gain a shot at, or knowledge of the red-skins' movements from the fort, they would have to expose themselves to an ambushed-shot that might easily prove fatal.

So he began gathering up such large rocks as he could lift upon the two boulders, unmindful of the angry yells of the enemy. As Barham discharged another missile of death, Pete glanced around to note the effect.

A second red-skin was rolling in death-agony upon the ground; but undaunted, the remainder still pressed onward. Shafer stooped down and grasped a couple of heavy stones, and hurled them with terrific force at the red-skins, who soon had enough to do in dodging them, without advancing any further.

"Load up, 'Riab. quick!" yelled Pete, sending another volley down the hillside.

One simple fact saved, in all probability, the life of the daring fellow. The foremost Indians were between him and those below, who had by this time reloaded their firearms, but who did not dare risk a shot at the scout for fear of killing a friend.

And thus with one last volley, Pete, who saw the savages stealing to one side, in order to secure an uninterrupted shot at him, turned and sprung over the rock into the little stronghold. The short delay, however, had enabled Barham to reload one rifle, and that might be invaluable.

"You 'tend to 'em, 'Riah, while I load. Your pistils are good fer that distance," muttered Shafer, as he rapidly recharged his gun.

The benefit of the scout's idea now became plainly evident. The savages began a fusilade upon the fort, and an exposed head would most assuredly have been perforated, but the smaller boulders were comparatively secure cover, while still allowing the white men to observe the enemy's movements.

Barham retained his fire until the Indians were within two-score yards of his position, and then he picked off one with his rifle; dropping it he drew his pistols. These, less accurate, only wounded two more, but as the last one spoke, Shafer added his contribution with deadly effect.

This reception would have disheartened the bravest Indians that ever trod the war-path, and bewildered at the large number of shots, where they had only calculated upon two, the warriors turned and fled down the hillside with yells of wondering dismay.

The golden opportunity was lost. Had they made a determined rush then, while the weapons of the scouts were all empty, they must have conquered by mere weight of numbers.

But the time of the two heroes had not yet come.

The unexpected respite was eagerly improved by the scouts, in putting their trusty weapons once more into serviceable condition, in readiness for the next assault, which they felt, no doubt, would speedily follow. When the Indians should recover somewhat from their momentary dismay, the thought of their dead and disabled comrades would act as a spur, urging them on to revenge.

Knowing this, the white men did not relax their vigilance, but stood in readiness to pick off the first foe who should expose himself sufficiently to bury a bullet beneath his hide, while the rocks upon the parapet amply screened their own heads. Their four shots, judiciously delivered, would scarcely fail to check a charge, and their spirits rose accordingly.

"'Riah," suddenly exclaimed Pete, in a solemn tone, "do you know whar we be?"

"On top of a hill; that is as near as I can tell you. Why?"

"Just as true as you live, 'Riah Barham, we're on that werry identickle hill as I was atop of in my dream. I knowed it the fust glimp'."

"But the *glue*, Pete, where's that?" idly responded Barham, at the same time keenly noting the movements of an Indian, more venturesome than his comrades, who was slowly and cautiously approaching the stone fort.

"Thar it is—the wust kind o' glue, too, an' 'll stick to us as long as they kin, anyhow. The on'y thing that ain't jest right is that you're 'long with me, 'stead o' bein' ro'sted over a slow fire with honey, by that 'ere gal-spook. But then you cain't expect to hev a dream come true jest so in every thin'. Anyhow thar's the *glue*, an' here's the hill, an' ef we ain't stuck

on top of it as *I* was *then*, then I don't want a cent. But we got cl'ar, though I lost my britches. I tell you, 'Riah, it's a shore sign, an' we'll git free yit, britches or no— Thunder! man, plug that 'ere varmint!"

This sudden exclamation was drawn from the garrulous scout by noticing the leading savage boldly exposing himself to view. In order to gain the next point of cover, nearer the stone fort, the Indian found himself obliged to pass over some ten feet of open space, where he would be fully revealed to any eyes that might chance to be watching in that direction.

But his immunity thus far, and the natural desire of a young brave to "show off" his courage and contempt for danger, impelled him to attempt what an older and more experienced warrior would have avoided by a roundabout course. And perhaps he relied upon accomplishing the feat so quickly that the besieged scouts would be unable to secure any thing like an aim at him.

And so he gathered himself up, and straining every muscle, made the leap. This action it was that interrupted the reasoning of Shafer, and drew forth the exclamation recorded.

Barham knew his business, and for some time past had been watching the daring savage; hence the sudden action did not take him by surprise. The rifle was already leveled, and as the dusky form sprung up, the whiplike report rung out, and stopped in mid-air by the death-dealing bullet, the warrior fell quivering to the ground in the open space, while his life-blood stained the gray rocks with its sanguineous dye.

The usual yells of rage followed this blow, but the redskins did not rush forward, as anticipated, seeking for revenge. The fatal rifles had effectually banished all such thoughts, and they had evidently resolved to await the slower but surer means of cunning.

Knowing the peculiar formation of the ground, the Indians had but little fear of their game escaping them, and knew that in the night-time their danger would be lessened full one-half, while their chances of success would be increased proportionately. And this thought had occurred to the scouts, as well, causing them to feel that they were indeed in a precarious situation.

"'Riah, you did that jest as well as ef it had bin me. It 'minds me of a shot—no, durned ef it does, 'ither! This ain't no time for lyin'; the truth's plenty bad enough," muttered Shafer, suddenly interrupting himself.

"True for you, Pete, and if you had only remembered that *sooner*, you'd be better off," remarked Barham, earnestly.

"Mebbe so, but I guess not. Why, man, ef I didn't let out some on the pesky stuff, once in a while, blamed ef I don't actilly b'leeve that I'd git so full I'd swell up an' bu'st! I do, raily! 'Tain't my fault. It was borned in me. Dad, *he* was a yarner, now you'd better b'lieve he was! He l'arnt me how, an' then used to whop me like hangnation 'ca'se I wasn't a better scholar.

"He could discount me double, could the old man. Pore, old critter, it was the death o' him, *it* was, too. Orful fond o' usin' gre't big words, he was; one on 'em that he got hold on was nigh twic't as long as my arm, by actil measure. It was e'en-a'most too much for the old coon to han'le, an' one day he went to spinnin' it out, an' got purty nigh half through, when the pesky thing stuck crossways in his throat. Mam she thumped him on the back mighty lively to keep 'im from chokin', an' fin'ly knocked the durned thing clean out. But it broke his jaw, *it* did, a-comin' out all in a heap.

"The *physicum* said as how he mustn't speak a word for a month, while his jaw-bone sot, like, ag'in, ef he wanted to git well, an' dad he promised. He was proud o' never breakin' his word, the old man was, an' he kep' still for a hull week. He growed fat on it, orful fast, too. Kep' me standin' aside him to hold the buttons on, an' mam behind him a lettin' out his clo'es an' a-settin' in pieces so's to make 'em big enough. Ef you'd snap him he'd sound jest like a big drumhead or a over-growed gourd, his skin was so tight. On the eighth day he jest give a kick an' keeled over, deader'n a tumble-bug under a waggin-wheel!

"Doctor he said reck'n'd as how 'twas dropsy, but *I* knowed better. It was the pesky lies that he'd kep' in till they stuf-focated him. That's the way *I* ixpect to go under, too," placidly added Pete, with a melancholy sigh.

"Not much danger, if you only keep on at this rate," impatiently retorted Barham.

"Thar it is ag'in! Ef I tell the plum up an' down solid truth, you say I'm a-lyin'; an' ef I keep still you say I'm a-*thinkin'* lies, so what's the use, anyhow?" added Shafer, with an injured look at his companion.

The hours passed by wearily enough to the besieged hunters, and so impatient did they grow at this monotonous suspense, that even an onslaught from the Indians would have been gladly hailed, as a change. But nothing of the kind occurred.

The savages had formed their plans and they intended to carry them out, without running any more risk than was absolutely necessary. When the shades of night should descend to aid them, they could easily draw near the fort without discovery, and then one determined rush would insure them the victory.

It was not to be supposed that they could overpower the scouts without some loss upon their side, but for this they had allowed. And each warrior nursed the comforting belief that *he* would not be the unfortunate one that must fall; who the doomed ones were did not matter, just so he was not one of the number.

But this collision was fated never to occur—upon that night, at least, and Pete's prediction they would escape the Indians, "britches or no britches," was fulfilled.

Shafer, naturally of an inquisitive turn of mind and disliking any steady employment, had left Barham to keep watch upon the foe, when they were assured that no immediate attack was to be apprehended, and had turned toward the precipice, finding a seat and lighting his pipe for a comfortable smoke. Fond of his ease, Peter never permitted disagreeable surroundings to deprive him of this luxury, if he could help it.

As he sat upon the edge of the cliff with feet dangling over the escarpment, his little pale blue eyes were roving restlessly around him. At first Pete gazed down into the depths below with a vacant stare, for escape by that direction had never for a moment entered his mind.

It seemed impossible for any thing not possessing the power of aerial flight to accomplish such a feat. But suddenly the scout's roving glance became fixed, and a smile of triumphant joy overspread his lank, sallow visage.

He thought that he had discovered a mode by which they could extricate themselves from the trap, and at the same time disappoint the waiting savages. But he did not speak, preferring to make sure that such was the case before telling his comrade.

Below him, at not more than a dozen feet distant, was a narrow ledge of rock. But this alone did not cause his feeling of exultation.

Below it again, at not more than one half the distance, was another shelf, somewhat narrower, but of a similar character. Then from this he could discern a series of rude steps and points leading downward and to the right of his present position, that seemed sufficient to enable a clear-headed and determined man to descend the cliff by, especially when nerved by the fact that almost certain death awaited them in the stone fort, as soon as night fell.

Pete could not see how the trail ended, as it turned around an abrupt curve, but he believed that the means of escape lay before him, although at a fearful risk. One false step or a break in the trail would doom them to almost certain death, for there would be no turning back when once started.

The thought of his dream, and his escape, still further confirmed Pete in his belief.

CHAPTER III.

PETE'S "STAIRWAY."

PETE SHAFER firmly believed that he had found the means of escaping from their enemies, and felt highly elated as may be imagined. So with one more long look at the "stairway," he arose and approached the spot occupied by Uriah, who was still keeping a close watch upon the movements of those occupying the hillside, ready to improve the opportunity did one of the red-skins expose themselves to view within rifle-shot.

"Say, 'Riah," began Pete, in a drawling tone, "be you most ready to go?"

"Go where?" asked Barham, not removing his gaze from the hillside.

"Why, anywhar—out visitin' or a-callin' on that 'ere gal-spook, ef your mind is still bent that a-way."

"Why of course! I'm ready; but where are your wings?" retorted the young scout, a little nettled at what he supposed one of Peter's nonsensical jokes, at such a time.

"Don't want none, this time. Don't you 'member what I said a bit ago? That we'd git away, britches or no britches? Wal, we kin do it, an' still keep our legs kivered. I knowed my dream *meant* somethin'. We found the hill—this 'ere one—an' the glue—them yander red-skins; an' to finish it up all right I must git loose an' holp *you* too. An', sir, jist as shore as you is borned I've did it! Ef I hadn't, why I wouldn't say so!"

"You have—in earnest, Pete?" eagerly cried Barham.

"Cross my heart, I hev!" returned Pete, suiting the action to his words. "We kin leave this 'ere trap jest as soon as we darn please, an' them ar' critters won't be a mite the wiser until they try to climb in here. But afore *that* time we'll be a long ways from *this* spot."

"But how—I don't—" began Barham, hesitatingly.

"Jest keep a look-out here while I tell ye how it's to be did. Then you kin go an' see for yourself, ef you don't b'lieve me. That's right. Now lis'en.

"You see we'll go out the back door, so's not to *desturb* them gen'lemen in front. We kin tie our coats together an' one kin let the other down by them to the fust ledge. Then *he* kin hold on to the ridge thar an' drap down, while the fust one 'll be ready to sorter steady him, fer ef he shed make a slip—wal, thar'd be a chaine fer a dozent fun'rals, ef each hearse didn't take *too* many pieces.

"Then we kin jest keep along to the right ontel we retch the bottom—or the jumpin'-off place, whichsomedever it may be. I want you to take a good look at it an' see what's your 'pinion. I think thar's a chaine—an' a durned sight better one 'an ef we stay here tell night. But I leave it all to you," added Shafer, hurriedly.

"Well, you watch here—the nearest one is behind that red rock with the bunch of green on top of it—while I go and take a look at your stairway," and changing places with Shafer, Uriah turned toward the cliff.

Pete could not long remain still, and after a good look at the rock alluded to, he gave a low grunt, while a peculiar smile lighted up his countenance. Removing his old battered felt hat, the scout raised it upon the point of his knife, with one hand, at a little distance from him, as if it covered the head of one trying to gain a better view of the hillside.

Pete's other hand held his rifle to his shoulder, the muzzle supported upon the boulder, and aimed through a small crevice at the bunch of withered grass upon the red rock. His keen eye had caught sight of what he believed to be the glitter of metal, or of beads, through the slightly-waving tuft. And his suspicions were quickly verified.

Playing the decoy hat with considerable ingenuity, the hunter deceived the savage, as he had expected, and Peter beheld the shaven crest of a savage appear stealthily above the grass, with a leveled rifle against his cheek. His own weapon drew full upon the paint-bedaubed visage, and he touched the trigger.

At the same time a report came from the red rock, and the knife and hat were knocked from Pete's hand by a rifle-bullet. But the savage never aimed another gun.

With equal precision, the death-dealing bullet of the scout sped to its mark, and the Indian marksman fell backward, with a yell of mortal agony. Then Pete gave vent to a taunting cry of triumph at the success of his ruse, that was nearly drowned by the yells of the infuriate red-skins.

But those worthies did not move from their coverts; they saw more than ever that they had to deal with no common foe, and that their only safe chance was to await the coming of nightfall. And they contented themselves by sending a harmless shower of bullets at the stone fort.

Barham turned around in alarm at the double shot, but when he saw the perforated hat of Pete Shafer's, and heard the yells of rage from without, he divined the truth and warmly congratulated his comrade. Pete bore his honors meekly, and returned:

"Wal, what do you think of my back stairs, 'Riah?"

"They seem a little out of repair, Pete, but I think that we can do it. My nerves are steady enough to run the risk, if you think yours are."

"Me? I hain't got no narves. Got mad at the pesky things one day, an 'picked 'em all out with mam's darnin'-needle. Dad, he used to make a show o' me at home, 'ca'se as I hedn't no narves, I warn't easily scart, ye see. Used to send me up at the tail o' a gre't big kite on rainy days when the sun shined, so I could slide down the rainbow. Ef he didn't—*Corn* twist it, that's *another* lie! I cain't holp it! the pesky things jist slip through my teeth like they was greased. 'Tain't *my* fault," muttered Pete, as Uriah raised his finger in silent admiration.

"Never mind; but when shall we try it?"

"The sooner the better, I reckon. *Them* dratted imps won't stir any more afore night, an' by that time we'll be plenty fur enough away, or else down—"

"There—there, we won't think of *that*," hastily interrupted Barham. "The mere *thought* is bad enough, without speaking of it. But off with your coat. I'll lower you down, and then you can catch me as I drop."

"No, you don't—nary time. *I'm* goin' to be last. Dog-gone you, you al'ays want to hev all the fun," protested Shafer.

"Don't be obstinate, Pete, but come on. We've got no time to spare for fooling."

"I tell you I *won't* go fust. I found out the way, an' now you want to put all the resk onto *me*. 'Tain't fair—durned ef it is," persisted the brave scout, with characteristic generosity, choosing by far the most dangerous part for himself.

"You won't let me stay?"

"No. You've got to go fust ef I hev to stay here tell the crack o' doom. So don't gabble any more, fer it's o' no use. Here, fix the coats while I keep watch," said Shafer, decisively.

Barham well knew that all expostulation would be thrown away upon the stubborn scout, and so he carefully knotted the garments together, and then announced all as ready for the perilous attempt. The Indians were lying behind their rocky

coverts, in blissful ignorance of their anticipated victims' preparations for flight, patiently awaiting the fast-coming night.

The two scouts silently clasped hands, and then entered upon their undertaking, not knowing but what it was only precipitating their fate. Barham clutched one end of the rope, while Pete braced himself the better to resist the strain, and then the younger scout gently lowered himself from the edge of the cliff, and hung suspended above the frightful depth.

Gradually and cautiously Shafer allowed the rope to pass through his hands, sitting close to the escarpment. Then the end was reached, and he gave a low whistle, as agreed upon.

With a muttered prayer, Barham relaxed his grasp, and dropped lightly to the ledge, only a foot below him. Pete could scarcely restrain a shout of triumph, as this was accomplished; but by far the worst still remained.

He passed the rifles down to Uriah, and then paused for a moment, in order to steady his nerves for his terribly trying venture. He must grasp the rock with his naked hands, by such points as he might find, and lowering himself over the abyss, drop down to the narrow ledge, where, did his foot slip a particle, an almost certain death awaited him.

But his courage was equal to the emergency, and with one more glance toward the hillside, Pete knelt down and slowly backed himself over the edge of the precipice. His face was pale and rigidly set, his eyes were cold and stony, but his frame trembled not, and his nerves were like finely-tempered steel.

Slowly, inch by inch, did he lower himself, until his head was level with the rock. Then a cold, death-like thrill crept over him, and a spasm of horror shot athwart his ghastly-pale visage.

The point of rock to which he was clinging, was cracking—giving way!

But he did not utter a cry or allow a sound to escape from his tightly-clenched teeth. If die he must, he would not destroy the hopes of his comrade's escape by telling their foes how matters stood.

Quickly loosing his hold, the daring man shot down through the air. The effort had thrown him out from the face of the

cliff, and his feet struck upon the outer edge of the narrow ledge!

Peter Shafer felt himself falling—down—down into what seemed an unfathomable depth.

Then came a shock, and an iron grip was fastened upon one arm and hand.

Uriah Barham had anxiously watched the venture, and had heard the terrible cracking of the rock. He saw that the projection which supported Pete was giving way, and felt that his loved friend and comrade must die before his very eyes!

Then Pete dropped down, and as he sunk over the ledge, Barham grasped him firmly by the arm and hand, as stated. But the shock was almost too much for the young scout to sustain upon his precarious foothold, and he felt that instead of being able to draw up his comrade, he himself was slowly but surely being dragged over the precipice!

Ah! the torture of those few brief moments! So short in actual space, yet so long in horrible agony!

Barham knew that he could save himself did he only relax his grip a trifle—the veriest trifle would suffice. It already required all his strength to uphold the heavy inert form, and slowly but with dreadful certainty his own powerful figure was forced to bend, in order to keep his feet.

That way only one would die, the other live. But did he hold on, then both must meet the same doom!

These thoughts flashed through the mind of the young scout, by no will of his. He comprehended their truth, but that was all. He did not for a moment dream of sacrificing the life of his friend—almost brother—in order that he might preserve his own.

Together they had lived, together had they gotten into this scrape, and together they would escape from it, or, if must be, together they would die, true to the last!

Just as Barham was about giving up in despair, feeling that another minute must end the dreadful trial, he felt the heavy, dead strain upon his arms slightly relax, and then almost altogether cease. Then the truth flashed upon his mind.

Owing to the intense excitement of the peril, both of the scouts had entirely forgotten the existence of the *second ledge* that jutted out from the cliff at not more than six feet below

the first one, and over this had Shafer been suspended, gradually sinking lower until his feet touched the solid shelf.

Then Pete knew that he was saved, thanks to the quick eye and sure hand of his comrade, although the greater portion of trial might have been spared had the danger not driven this fact from their minds. Quickly regaining his accustomed *nonchalance* and composure, Pete whispered:

"It's all right, 'Riah, so don't try to pull me out any longer'n I am. Stretched me 'bout a foot *that* time, I shouldn't wonder!"

"Are you safe?" pantingly asked Uriah, as he sunk down upon the bench and pressed one hand to his heart, that now throbbed most painfully.

"Yes, thanks to *you*, I be. Lord! but wouldn't I 'a' spat-tered up them ar' rocks down yonder, ef you hadn't 'a' cotched me!" muttered Pete, with a comical grimace at the abyss below him, into which he had so well-nigh been precipitated.

Barham did not reply, for this sort of jesting appeared to him almost like blasphemy, following so close upon their providential escape. He lay back and covered his eyes, the better to regain his wonted steadiness of nerve. Pete understood the action, and remained silent for some moments, but then fearing to lose more time he spoke:

"Say, 'Riah, don't you think we'd best be goin' purty soon?—Them pesky imps up yander may take a kinder sorter notion to peek over the aidge up thar, an' then *wouldn't* we be in a nice fix, I guess not!"

"You are right, Pete, and I will try it now. Here—take your coat and put it on. Then set down the rifles and steady me as I drop."

The garments were quickly donned, and Barham soon stood beside Shafer upon the narrow ledge. Then securing their rifles across their backs so as to leave their hands free and unincumbered, the two scouts were ready to resume their flight, so terribly inaugurated.

Neither spoke a word, for they both realized the danger that threatened, every step, and breath was far too precious to waste in idle speech. Then Shafer slowly and cautiously led the way, and gained the next step in safety.

It was a thrilling sight, and one that might well have caused

a stout-hearted man to tremble, even to have watched the daring scouts. Their proceeding along the almost perpendicular face of a cliff, hugging it closely and clinging to such points and crevices as their hands and feet could find; forced to trust their full weight upon spurs of rock that they knew not whether a breath of air might be sufficient to loose it from the cliff.

But Providence seemed to watch over them and to guide their footsteps in safety. Step by step, foot by foot, those iron-nerved men advanced along their precarious "stairway," until the sudden curve was reached beyond which they knew nothing of what awaited them.

Did the series of steps break off here, or were they so far apart that foot could not reach them, then nothing remained for it but certain death! There was no such thing as retracing their steps.

Though they might come down, they could not hope to ascend by the same route, even could they manage to turn themselves round. The strain upon their muscles was fearful, and they were growing momentarily weaker, and less steady-nerved.

Did the pathway run out, then they must cling to their precarious perches until Nature failed them, and then—

Then a cruel death upon the jagged rocks below awaited them!

This was the greatest danger that they had foreseen before entering upon the attempt, but still it was the one that offered a *hope* of escape, while did they remain in the stone fort until nightfall, their doom was surely sealed. Trusting in Providence, they had ventured, and now they saw that their confidence had not been misplaced.

When the curve was reached, Shafer uttered a low cry of heartfelt thanksgiving, and sprung lightly forward. A score yards carried him out upon a hard and secure bench, that wound around the hill as far as the eye could reach.

They were saved from the very jaws of death, and the two scouts sunk down, with a sigh of gratitude, upon the solid rock. Neither spoke for some moments, for their hearts were too full of joy and praise for their deliverance.

Shafer, as usual, was the first one to break the silence.

"Wal, 'Riah, here we be, safe an' sound, upon solid airth—or rather *rock*, for I don't want to tell no lies *this* soon—whar I never ixpected to be ag'in, *alive*!"

"It was terrible!" said Barham with a shudder.

"Wuss'n *that*—wuss'n *two* turribles, a durned sight! You know that I ain't overly much o' a coward, 'Riah, an' that it takes good deal to skeer me right *bad*, ef I *am* a little cuss—but I own up, that got me! I *was* afeerd, an' so blamed badly skeered that ef I hedn't been afeerd, I'd 'a' shuck clean out o' my moccasins! Talk about—no, I won't do no sech a thing, ayther. I said that ef I ever lived to get cl'ar, that I'd never tell a lie ag'in, ef I bu'sted like dad did—*didunt*, I mean. We war in a tight fix up yander with the reds, but ef I war up thar ag'in, an' had only this 'ere to go through to git free, durned ef I wouldn't stick it out thar, anyhow. It was orful—*horridable*!"

"It was indeed, and I hope never to be obliged to pass through another such a trial. And then when I thought you were gone—over the cliff! When I saw that I could not hold you up, and that in spite of my best I was slowly being dragged over after you! Pete, we have much to be thankful for this night!" solemnly added the young ranger in an awe-stricken tone.

"*That* warn't nothin'! Why, I war only jest a-lettin' on then. I knowed that the rock war thar, all the time, but I wanted to see how badly I could skeer *you*!" declared Pete Shafer, innocently.

"You, Pete!"

"I fer— come, le's go," stammered the long scout, abashed at thus soon falling into his old habit of lying, and arising, he led the way with long and rapid strides along the broad pathway.

The day had fled rapidly, during the time consumed by the scouts, and the sun was now near the western horizon. However, they had but little fear of their *trail* being followed, and did not much care how soon the savages discovered their escape. It was not likely that the Indians—whom Pete had declared belonged to the same tribe as those they had seen in company with the strange maiden, Kickapoos—would cause them any more trouble for that night, at least.

Even did they strike their trail after leaving the hills, it could scarcely be followed during the night, and by the time day dawned, they would be far away. So the white hunters strode rapidly on, keeping the hill between them and their foes, until the forest was reached, when they once more turned toward the trail they had so abruptly left that same morning.

Barham had not been daunted in the least by the dangers he had experienced thus far, but on the contrary, was still more determined to find out the strange girl and learn more of her, if that was possible. Just what he wished to know, he could scarcely have told himself.

He had seen enough to feel assured that she was not held as a captive by the Indians, and as certainly she was not of their race, nor did a drop of savage blood run in her veins. Most probably she had been captured during childhood, in one of their forays, and had been brought up to consider herself as one of their number.

But would she not return to her own race, if an opportunity should offer? The young scout firmly believed that she would. At any rate, if possible, he would make the offer.

The two hunters did not pause for aught, save to break their trail by means of a creek, that they met, and concealed it adroitly after leaving the water. They had not found the missing trail, for now it was too dark for them to follow it, if it lay before them, but pushed on in the requisite direction, as near as they could judge, relying upon recovering it when day dawned.

CHAPTER IV.

ANEOLA AND RED IRON.

THERE was nothing so very mysterious connected with the history of this forest sprite who had so deeply interested the young ranger, Uriah Barham, and also Peter Shafer, despite the assertions of the latter to the contrary. But her life had been a somewhat romantic one ; eventful from her very birth.

Who she was or what her name, none could now tell, and as far back as her own memory dated, all had been as it was now; she was surrounded by Indians, who seemed to her to be her own race; played with copper-colored papposes, whom she called brother and sister. There was a half-breed woman whom she was taught to call mother, and the old silvery-haired chief whom she called father.

As she grew older, the half-breed, who had forsaken civilization—home, friends and all—to dwell with the Kickapoo chief, High Lance, taught the little blue-eyed waif her letters, and from that to read and write and to talk the language of the pale-faces. But with all this the woman—Still Water—taught the little Aneola to love the red-men and to look upon them as her true and only people. Her own love rendered her an able teacher, and the little stray soon learned to shudder and turn pale at the legends told of the cruelty and bitter wrongs that the Long-knives had put upon the red-men.

The old Kickapoo sachem, too, took great pride and interest in his adopted child, the more so that the fortunes of war and illness had left him without living relations, save his wife, Still Water. He used to spend hours in time of peace, in teaching the little Aneola how to ride, to swim, to aim the rifle, and send the feathered arrow home to the mark with unerring certainty; and in the science of wood-craft, until, as she grew in years, the pupil could, in most of these arts, surpass her master.

Then the child gradually developed into the woman, and her carefully-nurtured aversion, aided by the care of the chief, kept her aloof from all white men who chanced to visit the tribe, or had dealings with the Kickapoos. Outwardly she was white, but her heart and mind were all Indian.

Perhaps we ought to except one thing. Aneola, far-famed and celebrated for her beauty and accomplishments, as a matter of course did not lack for lovers; but to all she turned a deaf ear. None could please her, or if they did, it was not with the kind of sentiment that they sought to inspire.

There was one young chief—and young as he was, his fame as a warrior and hunter was second to none save that of High Lance himself—whom the chief favored openly and warmly. Red Iron was his choice for the husband of his

child ; but he did not care to force the inclinations of the maiden, although he was pained to observe how little progress the young brave made in his ardent suit.

Thus matters stood when our tale opens.

Late in the night of that day upon which the two scouts first beheld the forest beauty from their place of concealment upon the hillside, the little cavalcade defiled from the hills and entered upon a broad level plain where stood the Kickapoo village. This was that portion of the tribe who owned High Lance for a chief.

This village was a place of considerable importance, consisting of some ninety lodges, and could muster over two hundred able warriors. Toward the west stretched an undulating plain for several miles, sparsely studded with small *mottes* or "timber islands." Upon the south and east grew dense thick woods, and upon the north, where ran a creek, a range of high hills rose abruptly from the water's edge.

Winding through the forest in an erratic course the creek finally emptied its waters into the Wabash, some half a dozen miles from the red-skin village.

The sun had not long arisen when a dainty form emerged from the neat little white canvas tent, situated near the center of the town, and rapidly threading the crooked "street," approached the forest. There could be no mistaking that figure, had it once been seen, for aught other than the Forest Princess, Aneola.

A fanciful head-dress of brilliantly-colored feathers rested upon her sunny hair, and the dress of blue stuff was replaced by a more substantial one of bleached fawn-skin, embroidered with bright beads and stained quills. Peeping over her shoulder was a small quiver of arrows, and the bow she held in her hand.

Reaching the woods, Aneola paused to bend her bow, and drawing a sharply-tipped arrow from the quiver, she proceeded at a quick, agile step further into the woodland depths. A covey of quails ran across her path, and then one of the cocks paused to utter his whistle of alarm, erecting his prettily-marked head to gaze at the intruder whose footsteps had startled them.

Aneola paused and quickly fitted her arrow to the string,

and then, seemingly without effort or aim, the bow was bent nearly double and the arrow sped upon its mission of death. A rapid fluttering followed, and then the covey arose in flight.

The beautiful huntress secured her game, and a little smile of triumph curled her lip. The body was entire, but the mottled head was gone. Recovering her arrow, Aneola resumed her way, her eyes roving keenly around and above her.

Suddenly a frown darkened her brow, as she abruptly paused. Before her lay the plainly-defined imprint of a foot that her well-trained eye knew was clad in a moccasin. And that she recognized it was plain.

"Red Iron! I thought I would miss him. My sport is up now, for if he meets my trail he will follow on. Why is it that I dislike him so much? He is brave—a good warrior and hunter—none better or more successful, and then, too, the chief favors him. But I do not—*can not* love him, despite his vows," Aneola murmured, in a half-doubting tone, casting a quick glance around her.

Then a peculiar smile flitted over her face as her head slightly inclined toward the east. Her well-trained ear had caught the faint echo of approaching footsteps, and she felt assured that the young chief had indeed struck upon her trail and was following it up in hopes of overtaking her.

"I will give the impudent fellow a good scare," murmured Aneola, while her rosy lips parted in a silent, gleesome laugh, as she glided toward a small clump of bushes that clustered densely around the foot of huge forest tree.

Beside the rugged trunk she paused, and fitted the notched arrow to the string, and then peered out through a small opening, toward the point where ran the trail. At almost the same instant a rapidly-flitting form came in sight, with head low bowed toward the trail so faintly impressed upon the carpet of damp leaves.

It was that of a young Indian, a model of symmetrical strength and grace. His scalp-lock was intertwined with the long feathers of the golden eagle, but the rest of his crown was closely shaven. His face and body were free from the disfiguring paint, and as he raised his head for an instant to

glance about him, one could see that he was unusually handsome for a savage.

Despite the high cheek-bones and narrow forehead that slightly retreated, bold, aquiline nose and short chin, there was an air of innate nobleness about the young Indian, that rendered his features attractive. And, as he stood there, his keen black eye eagerly roving around the surrounding objects, he seemed one born to command.

A mischievous light shone in Aneola's eyes as her bow was bent, and then the arrow sped upon its mission. True to her intention it just grazed the nodding plumes of the savage, and then she uttered a long, clear whoop; a fair imitation of the war-cry of the dreaded Chippewas.

Red Iron started as the arrow hurtled past his head, but when the cry came his rigid features relaxed into a soft smile, and the bright glare softened in his dark eyes.

"Aneola's voice is like that of the mocking-bird's, but it is too sweet for Red Iron to mistake it for that of a Chippewa," he uttered, in a musical voice, as he advanced toward the clump of bushes.

"Does the young chief follow the trail with his eyes shut, that he hears the arrow before he sees the hand that sends it?" pettishly retorted Aneola, as she stepped forth from her covert and confronted the savage.

"He was trailing a friend, not an enemy. His heart was in danger, but there was no fear of other injury."

"Has Red Iron found a bee-tree this morning, that his tongue speaks only sweet words that mean nothing?" sneered the maiden.

"Has Aneola forgotten her last words before she rode away with High Lance?" added the savage, ignoring the sarcasm.

"What words?"

"That when she returned she would tell the Kickapoo brave when she would enter his lodge as his wife."

"Whether I would or no, you mean," she corrected. "But I can not tell you now. I must have more time to think. I would not refuse the hand of so brave a warrior without much study; but if you urge me now, I shall have to answer *no*," decisively replied the maiden, in a slow, deliberate tone.

"The chief will wait, but the day must be long and painful until the words are spoken," regretfully replied Red Iron.

A sudden interruption came at this juncture, and although it did not assume the most agreeable shape, Aneola did not altogether regret it, for the interview was, to say the least, rapidly becoming displeasing to her taste. A crashing sound was heard in the underwood, and then a huge black bear entered the little opening where stood the two persons.

Upon observing them, Bruin abruptly paused and uprose upon its hams, with a low, threatening snarl of rage. This unusual proceeding was no doubt caused by the pain of a wound it had lately received, the blood flowing freely from its side.

The young chief sprung before Aneola, who did not shrink, so confident was she that Red Iron would protect her from harm, knowing also his address and courage. As she beheld the Indian raise his rifle to his cheek, a touch of the annoyance she had felt broke out in words, before she thought of what might be the consequence.

"Is that the way an Indian chief meets his foe when the eyes of the maiden he loves are watching him?"

"No! this is the way," proudly retorted Red Iron, dropping his rifle, and drawing both knife and tomahawk, he sprung forward to attack the savage beast.

Aneola's cheek paled, but she did not speak. Quickly catching up the rifle from the ground she stepped to one side, thus throwing the young chief out of line with the bear.

Red Iron, as he rushed forward, nimbly avoided the blow aimed at him by the bear, and before the clumsy brute could recover his guard, or turn around, the Indian plunged his keen knife with a left-handed stroke deep into the animal's side. Dropping upon all fours the enraged brute rushed at his nimble, sure-footed enemy, who again avoided the onset.

At that moment a sharp report rung out upon the air, and the bear plunged headlong to the ground. Aneola had taken advantage of his heart being exposed by the extended forepaw, and with true aim had sent the bullet home to the seat of life.

A mingled expression of chagrin and admiration was

written upon the young chief's face, as he stooped over the bear to cut its throat and allow it to bleed. Then he arose, and said :

"Aneola feared that the bear would conquer the chief?"

"No. But she saw enough to know that Red Iron is as brave as his people think him, and so she shot the bear. Now she will go and tell the Kickapoos what she has seen, and send men to help the chief bring in his game."

The savage appeared pleased at the compliment, and gazed after the lithe, graceful form as Aneola glided away through the forest, toward the village. Then he bent over the dead bear, and began adroitly flaying it; the lover merged into the butcher!

CHAPTER V.

AN INTERRUPTED CONVERSATION.

ALTHOUGH the shades of night had long descended upon the earth, the two scouts moved steadily on through the thick tangled woods in dogged silence. Both were not a little fatigued, but Shafer was provoked at the obstinate determination of his comrade and would not again attempt to turn him from the path he had chosen; so he silently trudged after Barham, who gladly would have paused for the night, had Pete but spoken the word.

But that word was not uttered, and they proceeded, knowing nothing of where they were or what they were likely to meet; only that they were pursuing a southern course. Thus it was fully midnight when the two scouts finally paused.

They had been skirting the base of a considerable hill, not caring to undergo the toil of crossing it if possibly an easier mode could be devised of reaching the opposite side. A short search resulted in finding a narrow defile or ravine leading through the chain, and they cautiously passed through. A broad open tract lay before them, and pausing the hunters gazed out upon it.

"What now, 'Riah?" observed Pete.

"I move that we bunk in that clump of trees out yonder, until day. I, for one, am almost played out," responded Barham.

"Yes, it *would* be nice, I *don't* guess. Hev plenty o' comp'ny, too. Mought git some grub; who knows? Then you could ax that 'ere gal-spook who she raily is, you know. Lord, yas, s'pose we *do*?" muttered Shafer, placidly stroking his chin.

"What are you talking about, Pete? You get worse every day of your life, I do believe!"

"Glad to hear it; fer ef I keep a-gittin' *wuss* then I cain't be *all* bad, as you say I be. *Gelory*, I know what we kin do now! We'll jist walk out thar to *them trees* an' find the one whar that female critter roosts, an' capter her. Then you'll hug her tell she quits a-gittin' skeered—sorter holdin' her lips shet with your'n, an' talk pritty talk to her, an' go off some'rs an' hide. Then I'll tell that old white-headed cuss 'at I'll give her back to him ef he'll cross his heart never to cut up no more diviltry nor nothin' ag'in' the white folks, so help him John Henery! But ef he won't, then my army—which is *you*, ye know,—'ll hev a jolly time a-gittin' fat on '*gal-spook soup*,' an' then 'll come an' clean out the hull intire town! Don't ye see, 'Riah?"

"In *course* he'll knuckle down, putt his war-hatchet down at the bottom o' a ten-fut hole, kiver it up an' stamp down the airth. Then we'll bring back the gal, hev a corn-shuckin' or a quiltin' bee an' a raal old shindig; then go home all kivered with—*Jerusalum* crickets! 'Riah, hunker down or we're gone fer shore!" hissed the lank scout, suddenly interrupting his string of nonsense, and rapidly gliding to one side, where the hill cast a dense shadow.

He was closely followed by Barham, who did not need to ask his reason. From the further end of the defile behind them there arose a long-drawn, quavering cry that filled the still night-air with echoes indescribably thrilling and mournful.

It was the death-wail of the Kickapoos!

The truth may be briefly stated. Shortly after sunset the Indians who had, as they imagined, safely "corraled" the two daring scouts, began their advance up the hillside toward the stone fort.

In momentary expectation of hearing the report of the death-dealing rifles that had already so thinned their ranks, the Kickapoos observed all possible caution to preserve their own lives and surprise their enemy ; but at length the last cover was reached, and then with a loud, exultant yell they rushed forward and sprung upon the barricade. So furious was their onset that those in the rear pressed the foremost ones over the boulder into the open space, and a wild death-shriek followed, as one of the braves toppled over the precipice.

It was some little time before the real state of affairs was suspected, and the fort found to have been empty. But where were the white men? Had they been driven mad with despair of escaping, and had cast themselves into the abyss to avoid death at the hands of their enemies?

If not, then where were they?

Some of the Indians immediately descended by the hill-side, and thus gaining the foot of the cliff, searched for the dead bodies. They found only one; the mangled form of their own comrade who had been precipitated over by his friends.

But the pale-faces could not be found, and a feeling of superstitious awe filled the minds of the Kickapoos. The gloom of night concealed from them Pete's flight of stairs, and one belief assailed them all.

They had not been fighting common men of flesh and blood; they had been warring against spirits, who had vanished into the thin air when they were satisfied with the punishment they had inflicted upon the presumptuous red-men.

And then the Kickapoos, sadly affrighted and dejected, collected their dead and proceeded rapidly toward the villages. By pursuing a more direct course than that pursued by the scouts, they had arrived at nearly the same time, and it was their cries that had so suddenly checked Pete Shafer's brilliant plan.

The two hunters crouched down low in the shade, and prepared their weapons for use in case a collision should ensue. They had easily divined that the new-comers were their friends of the stone fort memory, but of course did not guess the state of mind in which they had returned.

Again the thrilling wail soared through the air, and this time it was answered from the "clump of trees," which Barham, whose vision was far less acute than that of his comrade, had failed to perceive the dark and silent Indian village. And then the slow, heavy tramping of feet was heard as the party came through the defile.

They walked slowly and dejectedly, bearing their dead and wounded, and unsuspecting that the authors of all this were so near them, passed unconsciously by, almost within arm's-length of the crouching forms of the white hunters, who even held their breath, for fear of its drawing attention toward them.

Crossing the creek that here made an abrupt bend away from the hills, the cortege advanced toward the excited, tumultuous crowd that poured out from the village. Then Shafer whispered to Barham:

"Now's our chaine, 'Riah, to snake out o' here. There's no tellin' what them imps 'll be up to, an' ef we shed be found now, it'd be all night, fer shore!"

"But where shall we go?"

"Walk pigeon-toed, an' git into the crick. Lose our trail thar, and then light out fer a safe kentry."

"You may, but I won't. If I die for it, I'm going to see that girl again, and take her with me, if she'll go," responded Barham, firmly.

"'Pears to me that you'd better go jine the reds at onc't. You've got one gal now, but that won't satisfy ye; you want another. Do that an' ye kin keep a dozent, ef so be you think you kin stand the pressure," angrily retorted Pete, vexed at the obstinate foolishness of his comrade.

"I'll break the trail and then hide away among these hills. I can keep out of their way for one day, at least, and then if don't see her, why I'll do just as you say. Will go back with you or stay, just as you decide."

"You won't go *now*?"

"No."

"Then I'll stay, an' hold you to the bargain. But mind ye now, Uriah Barham, ef ye go an' get me killed by these pesky red-skins, or 'chanted by that 'ere dratted gal-spook, I'll sue you fer damages jest as soon as I git home ag'in, now you mark my say so."

"All right ; but let's be going."

Entering the creek where it touched the foot of the hill, they proceeded in a crouching posture down the stream, feeling assured that the hard, rocky bottom would retain no traces of their passage. Then leaving the creek at a point where it turned off to enter the woods, the two scouts cautiously made their way up the rocky hillside, frequently pausing to assure themselves that their action was unobserved.

The village appeared fearfully excited, and several large fires were lighted, by whose ruddy glow the hunters could plainly distinguish the rude huts and wigwams, and the dusky forms of men, women and children flitting rapidly to and fro. And mingled with cries of rage could be heard the wild lament of some savage, who had lost a near and dear friend, a husband, a son, a father or a lover.

It was a thrilling tableau, and the strong forms of the scouts shuddered as they thought of the woe their arms had caused. But this was only for a moment, as they felt that they were not so greatly to blame. That it had been life against life, and fate had decreed they should be the victors.

As they neared the crest of the hill, they separated so as to the more speedily find a hiding-place, where they might lie concealed through the day, and at the same time be near enough to the village, so as to see all that transpired there, and if an opportunity offered, that they might seek an interview with the beautiful unknown. For to no less a height did the young ranger's resolve soar.

As the ground was rough and almost impossible to scale in the dark, their progress was exceedingly slow and tedious. Then Pete Shafer started in momentary alarm as he heard a fall and a half-stifled groan from his comrade. But his fears were quickly relieved as he distinguished the words :

"Pete, come here, quick ! I've stumbled over the very place, now !"

"I thought you did ; sounded that a-way, anyhow," muttered Shafer, as he cautiously approached the spot from whence the sound had proceeded. "Whar be ye, anyhow ?"

"Down here," Barham responded, his voice sounding from almost beneath Shafer's feet. "I slipped over the edge there and fell down. But you can catch hold of the bushes and

lower yourself easier. This confounded rock is awful hard; it almost knocked my brains out."

"It couldn't *quite* do that, I'll bet a cookie, ef it had struck ye twic't as hard. You left 'em all to hum afore you set out on this trip, or you'd have more blamed sense than to go trapsein' a'ter that pesky gal-spook, this a-way. She'll be the death o' you yit, jest see ef she don't. *Then* won't you wish you didn't done it, eh?" grumbled Pete, as he swung over and dropped lightly beside his comrade upon the level, rocky ledge.

One quick glance of the keen-eyed scout took in all the main features of the place, and a grunt of satisfaction broke from his lips. The ledge was narrow, and not more than twice as long as it was broad. The rear wall, as it rose upward, sloped forward, in much the same manner as a "lean-to," and then the hill ran on as before.

The front edge of the shelf was lined with a thick screen of bushes and shrubs, intertwined with grape-vines and climbers, extending high enough to meet those above. Thus with the dense foliage, and natural formation of the hill, a perfect covert had been found, by the lucky stumble of the young ranger. In this arbor the scouts could lie concealed for days without fearing discovery, save by the same accident that had revealed it to them.

Peering through the interstices in their leafy screen, the village lay revealed before them quite plainly, together with a good portion of the prairie and woods. Had they the planning of their retreat, it could scarcely have been more to their liking than this, or better fitted for their purpose.

"Pete, you fool," angrily exclaimed Barham, turning from his loophole toward the other scout, "what are you going to do with that pipe?"

"Smoke it, to be sure; why not?"

"No, you're not going to do any such thing. An Indian could smell that thing a good mile off. Put it up, or, true as I live, I'll throw both it and you down the hill yonder!" added Uriah, now fully aroused.

"Look-a-here, Mr. Uriah Barham, *Esquire*," slowly said Pete, arising from the rock upon which he was seated, "do you *mean* that? Be you lyin', or only jokin'?"

"Mean it—of course I do!"

"All right, then, I'll put it up. But 'member that I don't 'low nobody livin' to talk to me in that a-way in *fun*," impressively replied Shafer, replacing the blackened stump in his possible sack.

"That's right, Pete; you know yourself that it wouldn't do. And if we ever expect to get through with this job, we must use every precaution possible. I'd risk you anywhere, even before I would myself, if you would only *think*. But you are so careless at times, that I wonder we have come this far, without more trouble than we have had."

"True fer you, 'Riah, my boy. I'm dretful forgitful, *I* am. Was out huntin' one day, when I was a little shaver—long afore you was growed—an' shot a deer; awful big buck, *he* was, too! Horns—oh, Lord! Now when you come to talkin' 'bout *horns*, them *was* horns—reg'lar scroudgers *they* was! Dad, he tuck them 'ar horns an' sot 'em up in the cl'arin', p'int down'arts, an' then hung the deer-hide over 'em, fer a house. 'Twas so much too big fer one leetle fam'bly—thar was on'y fourteen o' us young-'uns—that he rented out one-hafe on it fer a grocery store, an' the other hafe fer a saloon; we lived in the rest.

"But as I was a-sayin', I was dretful forgitful when I was a leetle cuss. I shot that buck—it was a deer, wasn't it, or a bear—which? Wal, that don't matter, anyhow. I shot *it* then, an' was so tuck up with thinkin' what the old folks would say to my smartness, that I—like a blamed dunder-head as I was—drapped my rifle an' *went to loadin' myself!* Fact, so help me John Henery! I hed got the powder in an' swallowed a bullet, an' didn't find out the defference tell I choked on the p'int o' the powder-horn, which I was a-tryin' to ram the bullet home with!"

"Why, Pete Shafer!"

"Cross my heart, ef 'tain't so! Think I'd tell a *lie* 'bout it—*sec'* a lie, too?" replied Pete, with an injured cadence to his voice. "Made a good shot with it, though, a'ter all. You see I thought I was 'titled to a snort on the strength o' that shot, an' so I lifted my bottle o' corn-juice, an' kinder tuck a sight alongst it at the sky, when hope may die, ef a big gang o' turkeys didn't fly right over my head. The pizon was

orful hot and strong, an' the fust drap that retched the powder 'at I'd swallowed, tetched the durned stuff off! Then thar *was* a rumpus, now, I tell *you*! Ef thar wasn't, why I wouldn't say so.

"My mouth was open, *in* course, an' so the bullet jest slipped through the doorway, an' tuck one o' them turkeys spang through the head. It broke the bottle, but my mouth was big a plenty to cotch all the whisky, 'cept what was spilt, so thar wasn't much lost. An' that's what made my mouth so 'tarnal big—the bullet kinder stretched it, ye see," concluded Peter, in a sober tone of subdued melancholy.

"Lucky for you it did, for if it hadn't been as large now as it could be, without cutting your head clear in two, *that* lie would have been the death of you, Pete," retorted Barham.

After some further conversation, Pete volunteered to keep first watch, so that they might not be taken unawares, in case of any danger, adding :

"But now don't you git to snorin' like you did las' night, or I'll jest tie my bullet-molds over yer nozzle; see 'f I don't."

The night passed by without any thing occurring to particularly alarm the scouts, although the Indian village was still in a state of ferment, and its inhabitants were running to and fro until broad daylight, when they appeared to somewhat calm down, or at least became less noisy in their demonstrations of grief and rage.

After eating their scanty meal of corn and venison, the white hunters composed themselves to watching the movements of the red-skins below them, as the best means to wile away the day. They did not indulge in much conversation, for they did not consider it exactly prudent under the present circumstances.

They knew that many of the Kickapoo braves had started out at dawn, evidently with the purpose of solving the mystery connected with the escape of those who had caused the entire village to be filled with grief and wailing. And while feeling pretty confident their trail had been broken far too thoroughly since leaving the stone fort, for any savage, however well skilled and keen-sighted he might be, to trace them thus far, still one of the Indians might chance to approach within ear-shot of their covert, when, did a word attract his attention, of

course he would follow it up, and once discovered, the alarm would soon bring the entire horde down upon them, when their fate would assuredly be sealed.

There seemed scarcely a hope of their accomplishing their object of having an interview with the fair unknown, who had inspired them with such different and widely-varied sentiments, upon that day, at least, and it was the last one before turning back. But whether or no they did, Barham resolved that it would not be his fault: and his keen eyes roved restlessly over the wide prospect spread before him, in hopes of again beholding that trim and dainty form.

The hour of noon came and passed without the desired reward. The dead braves were being prepared for burial, and the wild, fantastic ceremonies were at their height, when Barham uttered a low, eager exclamation:

"Look, Pete, there she goes!"

"Yas, that's so! why, what an eye you've got, 'Riah! I didn't notice her afore. She must be *orful* old!"

"Old!" echoed the astonished scout.

"That's what I said; old—*orful* old, she be. I can see the wrinkles on her mug from here. Kerries her pipe an' smokin' tobacco in one of 'em, an' a live coal of fire in t'other. Bless ye, 'Riah, boy, *I* know *her*. Orful good-lookin' she was, too, when she was young. I hed a sorter sneakin' notion fer her myself then, but she give me the sack for a dratted old red-skin. That's 'Stick-in-the-Mud,' gre't gran'mother to that old white-headed cuss who was with the gal-spook, you know," glibly lied Shafer, evidently ill at ease.

"Why, Pete, you confounded old liar you! *that* an old squaw! It's the very girl we've been waiting for, and as this is my last chance, I am going to speak to her," replied Uriah.

"What—from here?"

"Bah! I'm going down there and meet her in the woods. She's gone out of the town to get rid of the noise and confusion, and—"

"Stop a bit, 'Riah. You 'member my dream? Wal, here's the hill—yander's the gal-spook, an' ef you go down thar she'll jest up an mustardize you, and then the next thing 'll be the *fire*, which won't be long a-comin', now *you* hear me. You shain't go!"

"I shall!"

"Then I'll go, too. Durned ef I stay here to lose my britches," declared Shafer, earnestly.

It was indeed Aneola that had attracted the gaze of the young scout. No danger of confounding that lithe, beautiful form with those of her dark-skinned friends. Like a bird of brilliant plumage she glided rapidly out of the village and proceeded toward the woods, apparently in order to escape the bewildering noise and confusion that seemed to form part of the burial ceremony.

Barham knew he was about to incur a great peril, and that very foolishly, for it was plainly evident that the fair being who had so attracted him was a friend of the Kickapoos, and not a captive. Consequently she could be no other than an enemy of his.

If she should suspect him of being one of the number who had stricken such a blow to the hearts of her adopted people, would not she give the alarm? One cry from her lips would be the signal for a chase—and then what?

Barham resolutely banished all such ideas from his mind, and reflected only upon one thing—how he should gain the woods without being seen. Once there, he would leave his future course to be decided by circumstances.

He cautiously crept up through the thickly-clustering foliage, and then paused to decide upon the best route to take. A moment's scrutiny showed him this, and then he began ascending the hill, bearing to the right, closely followed by Pete Shafer.

In a few moments the crest of the hill was gained, and, as he turned his head, Barham beheld the maiden just entering the forest. Marking her course, he once more proceeded, and now out of view of the valley, they advanced rapidly.

Ten minutes brought them to a point where they could descend to the forest without fear of being seen by those in the town, and they soon entered the woods. Barham had calculated closely where he would meet the girl, did she continue in her course, as she had begun, and then he advanced stealthily so as to avoid alarming her.

True to his hopes, Barham soon caught sight of the desired object, slowly approaching, apparently strolling aimlessly

onward, and all unconscious of the near presence of those of her own race. Then Aneola paused, and leaned thoughtfully upon the muzzle of her little rifle, her head bowed as if in deep musing.

"Here, Pete," hurriedly whispered Barham, turning to his discontented friend, and handing him his rifle, "you take this and wait here. Two of us might alarm her. If you see any danger approaching give your usual whistle."

"All right; but look ye, 'Riah, ef she gits you onter that 'ere slow fire an' goes to pourin' honey over ye, durned ef I don't plug her with a bullet, now you mind *me*! Lord," he added, as Uriah glided off unmindful of his words, "I do railly b'lieve the pesky fool is afeard that I'm going to try to cut him out an' do the love-makin' *myself*. No, *sir*, I ain't no sech a dratted gump-head as *that* comes to! I don't want no gal spook in *mine*, not ef I knows it!"

Barham noiselessly drew near to the still-motionless form of the Forest Princess, keeping a tree-trunk in line between them, until within a few yards of her position. Then he stepped out in full view and pressed one foot heavily upon a dried twig, that broke with a sharp snap.

Aneola instantly aroused and glanced up with a startled air. Then as she beheld the tall form of the handsome white hunter standing motionless before her, she quickly threw up her rifle, cocking it with the same motion.

"Who are you? Stop or I shoot!" she cried, in a clear voice, and her bright-blue eyes glanced steadily along the dark, deadly tube, bearing full upon the scout's temple.

The latter did not flinch or move from his tracks, but quietly waving one hand with a gesture of peace, he uttered, in a low, musical tone:

"Do not be alarmed, fair lady; I am a friend, and one who would not harm you to save his own life."

"Who are you, then?" asked Aneola, slightly raising her head, but still keeping the weapon at its aim.

"A friend, I repeat. Had I been otherwise, I should not have alarmed you until you were in my power. You were so deeply absorbed in thought, that I could have touched your shoulder before you heard me. You see, I am only armed with knife and pistols; if you bid me I wil lcast them aside also."

"You are a pale-face—then what do you want with me, an Indian girl?"

"I am of the same color and race as yourself. Surely we need not be enemies? I wish only a few words with you, and then if I can not be of any service, I will go as I came—your friend."

"Of service—and to *me*? Do you know that did I but raise my voice, two hundred brave warriors would rush to do my bidding? *They* are my friends, not you. If my skin is white, my heart is red, and they are the only people I know. Even now I hold your life at my finger's end—what is there to hinder me from taking it, and thus making the number of our foes less, by one?" half sneeringly replied the forest maiden.

"You are a woman, and human blood would but ill-become those hands. I trusted you with my life, if you will, and I know that you would not abuse such confidence. *That* is my security," boldly but earnestly replied the young ranger, as he advanced a step.

"Stop! If you come any nearer, it will be your death!" firmly cried Aneola. "You can speak from there and say what you have to tell me. Then you can go, for, as you say, I would not be treacherous to one who trusted in my honor. But after that—then all is as it should be. If I meet you again, it will be as an enemy, and I shall strike you as would one of my braves."

Barham was not a little perplexed, but resolved to persist in his purpose, though he paused and once more stood still. He gazed wonderingly at the figure before him, and despite the love that he felt for Myra Mordaunt, he experienced a strong sensation of ardent admiration, for this strange and beautiful creature, who spoke such stern and harsh words, so foreign to those one would naturally expect to hear from such winning lips.

"You would commit a grievous wrong then. You would slay a friend—one who is naught—who can not be aught else to you than a friend. We *will* meet again; I feel confident of that, and when we do, I shall stand as I do now, with folded arms, facing your rifle-muzzle. If you could shoot one who trusted in you, perhaps 'twould be better that you did so now; it might save us both sorrow and trouble."

"Never mind that now. Tell me why you have sought me here, and how did you learn to know who I was?" impatiently interrupted Aneola, and yet her tones were not devoid of a certain tinge of curiosity.

Barham quickly detailed the event at the crossing, where he had first beheld the strange being who had so deeply fascinated him, adding:

"I knew you were white, and I resolved to aid you to return to your own people, if you wished to do so. That is why I am here now. If you will go, I am at your service, and will guide you safely to any chosen point, at the cost of my own life. Will you go?"

"What! abandon my people—my friends, to go among enemies who would either kill me, or else force me to work in the fields with their other slaves? Never!"

"Poor girl! you have been sadly deceived," pityingly exclaimed the young scout.

"I'm *not* a poor girl!" and Aneola stamped her little moccasined foot upon the ground angrily, and drew her lithe, symmetrical form up to its full height. "I am a chieftain's daughter, and who is there who does not bow down and tremble before the form of High Lance? When I raise my voice, two hundred braves will rush headlong upon death itself, if I but bid them!"

"I did not mean in that sense. I meant that you had been deceived; that they had told you false tales of your own people. They make slaves only of those whose skin is like night. Their own women never work out in the fields, nor do they do any hard work, except to cook what their husbands provide, and to keep the house neat and clean. The men do all the dirty work, such as the Indians make their squaws do here."

"Do the chiefs of the Long-knives work like that?" asked Aneola, a little smile of scorn curling her dainty lip, as she lowered her rifle again, apparently unconsciously.

"Yes; they, like the rest. They love their women more than they do themselves, and try to make her as happy and glad-hearted as they can. The chiefs are only great and fierce in war; in time of peace they are like the rest."

"Are *you* a chief?"

"No, I am only a scout—a simple 'brave,' if you wish," returned Barham, advancing a little closer; a maneuver that did not appear to alarm Aneola in the least.

"You *will* be a great chief some time; you look like one now. Do you always speak as soft and sweet to *your* squaw, as you do to me, now?"

"I have none—I am not married," stammered Barham, not a little confused, he scarcely knew why. "But will not you go and visit your people—the pale-faces, I mean? Surely you can not love such a life as you must live here, among those savages!"

"*They* are my only people, and I could not leave them if I would. But *you* must go. You do not know what great danger you run here. If one of the Kickapoo braves should see you, even with me, he would slay you like a rattlesnake! They are fearfully angry now, because two pale— Ha! I forgot! *you* must be one of— But no!" Aneola added, after an abrupt pause, and speaking with slow earnestness. "I will not think that—I must forget it, for did I allow myself to believe such a thing, I should be forced to kill you. And that would be hard—very hard for me to shoot you now! I could not—my hand would tremble, and my eye grow blind! Why is this? I never felt it before. Ah! they said you were white spirits—you have cast a spell upon me! Go—go now, and leave me!" cried the forest maiden, in a tone of mingled terror and awe.

Before Barham could reply, there came a startling interruption. First he heard the low peculiar whistle that he and Shafer had so often used to denote coming danger, and then he distinguished a quick, heavy tramp approaching him from the direction of the village.

Glancing around, the young scout beheld the tall, sinewy form of a savage, bearing a rifle at half-poise, rapidly approaching the spot where he was standing.

CHAPTER VI.

AN AQUATIC PERFORMANCE.

URIAH BARHAM was brave; no one could deny that, but he experienced a thrill of alarm at this most unexpected interruption. Not that he feared the result of an encounter with the approaching red-skin, but he knew that one single cry from his lips would be sufficient to bring a force down upon him that would render all thought of either flight or resistance equally vain.

So, drawing a pistol, Barham resolved to await the action of the other, and not precipitate matters by any hasty action of his own. Did the savage not force a struggle, he would not.

But one glance at the bitterly scowling face and wickedly flashing eye told the scout that there was little hope of a peaceful termination to the adventure. Indeed, he only wondered that the savage had not begun hostilities before this.

The first words of Aneola, added to her action, explained this matter. Springing between the two foemen, she half raised her rifle with the muzzle threatening the Indian, crying:

"Back, Red Iron—back! You shall not touch him—he trusted his life in my hands and it is safe. If you dare to harm him now, I will shoot you like a wolf!"

She spoke in the dialect common to the allied tribes that formed the great "Miami Confederacy," to which the Kickapoos belonged, and as we have seen, both the white hunters were well acquainted with the *patois*.

"He is an enemy—one of those who killed our brothers and then fled! Red Iron must have his scalp," hissed the savage, but still pausing before the Forest Princess.

"Then let him take it as a Kickapoo chief should. Stop!" Aneola cried, as the Indian crouched down as if about to spring upon the white man, and her bright eye flashed along the clouded barrel of her leveled rifle, "one step forward and

you die ! I can not miss my mark at that distance, and as the Great Spirit hears me, I will kill you sooner than have you prove my word a lie ! Give him a day—an hour, and then take his trail. Then his life will be his own—now it is *mine !*”

“The chief has spoken. The white dog must die ! If Aneola wishes, let her take Red Iron’s life, but unless she shoots true, he will take the scalp of his foe !”

Barham raised his pistol hand ; the chief threw up his rifle ; Aneola stood between them with her weapon ready, an angry glitter in her eye that boded ill for the mutinous savage. It seemed that nothing could prevent bloodshed, and at such close quarters, every shot would inevitably claim a life as its portion.

Meanwhile what was Pete Shafer doing ?

He had accepted the rifle of his comrade, and beheld him approach the “gal-spook” with curiously mingled sensations. The glorious beauty of the strange girl had deeply impressed his mind, but not with the same feeling of pure admiration and—we almost had written reverence—that Barham had experienced.

The tall scout was confident that the sweetly enchanting exterior was only a mask to cover a terribly wicked heart, and that any connection with her could produce no good, even if it did not end in destruction. His fantastic dream had also wrought a deep and vivid impression upon his mind, that he could interpret in no other manner.

Naturally superstitious, he half-expected to behold the “gal-spook” fly away with his friend, or, at least, to bewitch him, and the words he had spoken to Uriah in parting, in a jesting tone, were fully half in earnest. He held his rifle in readiness for use, in case of treachery.

When Aneola drew a bead upon the young scout, Shafer had her covered with the sights of his rifle, and but from fear of alarming the village, that moment had assuredly been fatal for the forest maiden. And he was greatly relieved when he saw her raise her head.

Through all the conversation he had closely watched her every motion, and then he had caught sight of a dusky form approaching them from the opposite side, at the same time a

footfall met his ear. Uttering the signal agreed upon, Pete prepared to "take a hand in" the coming struggle, but paused again as he heard Aneola check the advance of the young chief.

Knowing how vitally important it was that the Indian village should not be alarmed, Pete abandoned Barham's rifle, and clutching his own firmly, glided rapidly through the bushes, keeping carefully concealed from view of the trio, and finally reached the rear of the party—or rather a point between them and the town.

Then keeping the three forms in line with the huge trunk of a forest tree, he rapidly approached them, with the noiseless speed of the velvet-footed panther.

Pete had gained the tree, about ten yards distant from the young chief, just as the latter uttered his last threat. Knowing that the report of firearms would alarm the Kickapoos—who knew that none of their number would indulge in hunting upon such an occasion—he dropped his rifle, glided around the tree, and with one astonishing bound, covered nearly two-thirds of the distance.

Aneola uttered a little cry of alarm—Red Iron, hearing the crash, swiftly turned around, and as he beheld the crouching form of a second enemy, he pealed forth his wild, thrilling war-whoop.

The sound had not died away upon his lips before the athletic form of the scout sprung forward, and his right arm shot out like a piston-rod, the hard clenched fist alighting with crushing force just beneath Red Iron's ear, hurling him to the ground like a shot, with the blood gurgling from his mouth and nostrils.

"Lay thar, dog-gone ye, till I say you may git up, you pesky imp, you!" vociferated Pete, as he turned to recover the rifle he had dropped.

A series of startling whoops now resounded from the village, telling plainly that they were fully aroused, and that nothing but instant flight would avail them aught.

Aneola was alarmed by the sudden and unexpected appearance of Peter Shafer, but Barham hastened to reassure her:

"He is my friend—you need fear no injury. Let me thank you for your brave interference in my behalf."

"No thanks, but flee while yet there is hope. If you are caught now, nothing can save you from a horrible death of torture! Flee—flee; you are my enemy again, but I would not have you killed," hurriedly exclaimed the Forest Princess, in agitated tones.

For answer, Barham clasped her waist with one arm, and bending pressed a warm kiss upon her ripe lips, before she could divine his intention. Then he turned, and snatching up the rifle of the senseless chief, dashed away through the forest after Peter.

Aneola gave a start, as of anger, and her cheek flushed as she half-raised her rifle; but then the fiery light softened in her lustrous eyes and a peculiar half-absorbed, half-rapturous expression chased away the angry frown. A deep sigh broke from her lips as the tall form of the handsome scout vanished among the thickly-growing trees.

Scarce five minutes elapsed from the warning yell of Red Iron, until the foremost Kickapoo broke out into the little glade, and uttered a cry of wonder as he beheld the senseless chief and Aneola. The latter hesitated only for a moment, and then said, hurriedly:

"They went in that direction—two pale-faces, toward the river. Hasten, or they will escape you. Take them *alive*—the one who injures them shall die the death of a dog! Aneola, the chieftain's daughter, has said it!"

The warriors—for full a score had by this time collected—looked astonished, but her will was law with them, for they well knew that her words would receive the support of High Lance, whose rage was not to be braved with impunity. Then they dashed along the broad, plain trail with the speed and accuracy of bloodhounds.

Meantime the scouts had diligently improved their opportunity, and knowing that there could be no hopes of safety in hiding anywhere in the vicinity of the town, sped on through the forest at a killing pace, hoping to reach the Wabash and cross it before the red-skins should come up with them. They knew the general direction and the probable distance they would have to traverse before reaching it, but that was all.

They could hear the distant yells of the Kickapoos as they

took up the trail, and knew that now nothing remained for it but a trial of speed and endurance. Their trail lay broad and open behind them, and the hunters well knew that the eagle-eyed savages would not experience the slightest difficulty in tracing it up at full speed.

The scouts had not traversed their second mile ere a new danger threatened them. The yells of their pursuers still rung out at intervals, and directly after one of these peals there came an answering whoop at only a few hundred yards before and to the left of the fugitives.

As if by instinct, Shafer bore to the right, closely followed by Barham, and then they increased their efforts, wrought to desperation by this new calamity. For a moment it seemed as if this move would save them, for there was a sort of dried "fog" and carpet of damp leaves upon the ground that in a measure deadened their footsteps, but it was fated not so to be.

Unfortunately for them the hunters were forced to cross diagonally a narrow belt of ground that was completely devoid of undergrowth and trees, being apparently the dried-up bed of some lake or pond. As they entered it at one side, the second body of red-skins emerged from the other, although at a good distance above the position of the fugitives, and consequently about the same distance in their rear, owing to the sudden change in the latter's course.

A series of wild hoots and yells told the fugitives that they were discovered, and then immediately altering their course, the Kickapoos—some ten or a dozen in number—dashed away after their anticipated prey. But the scouts determined that did these sport their scalps, they would have to first win them and the rate of speed with which they traveled through the woods not a little surprised the red-skins, who found themselves successfully rivaled at their own game.

The two parties of Indians finally joined each other, the first pursuers changing their course so as to intercept the race by cutting across corners, guided by the cries of their friends. The word was quickly passed around that the fugitives must be captured at all costs, alive and uninjured.

Shafer still led the way, and although ignorant of what might lay before them, did not falter. But the killing pace

could not long be maintained, and yet it was plain that they were fully holding their own, if indeed they were not gaining ground.

There could be nothing gained by separating, for the divided trail would inevitably be discovered and keenly followed. Fight was not to be thought of, for even then there would be fully a score against each one. So the comrades stuck together, resolved to escape or die side by side, if the worst must come.

Presently they caught a glimpse of a broad gleam of light, through the trees, and knew that they were at the Wabash. A simultaneous cry of joy broke from their lips, for they believed that they could by its means effect their escape, being thoroughly at home in the water, well-skilled swimmers and divers.

"'Riah, we must leave our guns. 'Twon't do to take 'em in thar. Do as I do," jerked out Pete Shafer, the long, ungainly strides seemingly acting as force-pumps.

Then as he passed a dense clump of bushes, Pete adroitly pitched his rifle into it, butt first, and Barham did the same. The weapons sunk down out of sight, and the bushes did not betray their entrance.

There the invaluable rifles would lie securely until the fate of the scouts was decided. If they escaped, nothing could be easier than to regain them, and should fate decide against this, they would never be used against their countrymen.

A brief moment sufficed to carry the two scouts out upon the bank of the smooth, placid river. Side by side they took a "header" out into the cool refreshing water. Turning their heads diagonally across and down the river, they exerted their utmost skill and speed through the water with marvelous rapidity, aided somewhat by the current.

But their hopes, again renewed, were doomed to be frustrated. The savages, knowing well the lay of the ground, felt assured that their game would be forced to take to the water, or else suffer capture.

The river made an abrupt turn to the north-west, just above the point struck by the fugitives, and toward this curve a number of the Indians turned. They had but just crossed the river, a little while before they had met the white hunters, and

lost no time in finding their canoes where they had been concealed, and launching them into the water.

Then they paddled swiftly down around the curve, gaining a view of the river below at the precise moment when the fugitives dove from the bank. With loudly-exultant yells they urged their boats forward, one of them diverging toward the opposite shore, in order to cut off the retreat of the hunters in that direction, while the other two sped swiftly down after the now visible whites.

Their yells of triumph quickly showed our friends their danger, and despair for the moment seized them. But then this gave way to a stern, desperate defiance, and they resolved to make as deadly a struggle for their life as possible.

"They've got us this pop, shore, 'Riah," gritted Pete, angrily. "But let's do our durnedest. Ef they git *my* skelp 'thout payin' fer it, then they *won't*, that's all!"

"I'm with you, Pete," coolly returned Barham, as turning upon his back he took a quick survey of the canoes, still keeping up with his comrade.

Truly they seemed environed with death! Two canoes behind them—one upon their left—and just then the Indians upon land gained the river-bank.

Escape seemed an impossibility, and now they did not even give it a thought. Their only purpose was to inflict as much damage as possible upon their enemy before they were overpowered.

With this understanding they ceased their efforts and floated slowly along down the river. The savages noted this action and greeted it with yells of delight, for they thought the fugitives, seeing their case was hopeless, had concluded to surrender without a struggle. But they were speedily undeceived.

Beneath the water the two scouts held their drawn knives, and right well they knew how to use them, as they soon gave bloody evidence. Uriah was the nearest to the foremost canoe, and as it shot by him, the steersman adroitly whirled it around, so that it paused directly between the two scouts.

One of the Kickapoos bent over to clutch Barham by the hair, a most unfortunate move upon his part. For, with a cry of defiant rage, the young ranger darted through the

water, raised his knife-hand and plunged his keen blade to the very haft in the red-skin's neck.

As the savage fell forward out of the canoe, dead or dying, Uriah dove and came up on the the opposite side. There he found Pete had not been idle.

The boat had rounded to within its own length of Shafer, who was facing it, with his weapon concealed beneath the water, while his other hand was stretched out and upward, as if appealing for help or mercy. One of the savages bent forward and extended a paddle to the scout, intending to draw him up within arm's-length, and thus effect his capture without serious trouble.

But Pete was not the man to submit so easily, and had resolved to make his mark before he went under. Grasping hold of the paddle he swiftly drew himself up toward the boat, and then as the Kickapoo extended his other hand to grasp him, Shafer "lent him one"—as he himself would have expressed it—right under the arm, that drove the long blade home to the very seat of life.

All this occurred like a flash, and the two Indians—one upon each side of the boat—fell into the water at the same moment. Then a brawny hand clutched Pete by the arm, and a paddle was raised to stretch him senseless, but he was now thoroughly aroused, and evading the blow, drove his knife through the forearm of the Indian, almost severing the member from the elbow.

"Sink the boat, Pete!" cried Barham, as he arose beside Shafer, knife in hand.

Then there was a brief skurry; blows were showered down upon the scouts, which they evaded as much as possible, while their keen knives, driven by strong arms, slit open the frail bark canoe like so much paper. A gurgling rush of water, and the canoe filled, casting its occupants into the river.

The second and third canoes were now at hand, and dashed forward into the middle of the confusion. Barham and Shafer had each grappled with an adversary, who labored under a serious disadvantage in remembering the commands of Aneola, to respect the lives of the pale-faces. Indeed, to that fact their lives were due, for the fugitives would have been shot or tomahawked at once, else.

Nimbly eluding a blow aimed at his face by his foeman, Pete turned partially around, just in time to see a brawny savage level a vicious blow at his head with the edge of a heavy ashen paddle, from the canoe. Throwing back his head and at the same time jerking his foe toward him, Pete was only struck with the rounded handle, while the edge of the paddle split the head of the Kickapoo like an egg-shell.

The blow was still a severe one, and throwing up his hands, Shafer uttered a half-stifled cry and then sunk beneath the surface of the muddy river. The one who had dealt the finishing blow eagerly watched for the reappearance of the white hunter, but the desired sight did not meet his gaze.

The slain savage reappeared, but nothing could be seen of Pete Shafer, greatly to the chagrin and alarm of the Kickapoo. His comrades had seen him deal the blow that had proved so fatal, and he well knew that they would not hesitate to accuse him of disobeying the orders of the chieftain's daughter, should she be angry.

And he had not only lost the white hunter, but had also killed his comrade by his ill judged blow. Really, his feelings were not to be envied!

Uriah Barham had made a good fight, but numbers overcame his resistance. The brave that had first grappled with him on the water was an unusually large and powerful savage, but as a natural consequence clumsy and slow in his movements, compared with the fish-like activity of the white man.

Relying upon brute force to conquer his antagonist, the Kickapoo clutched Barham and strove to throttle him. But an inch or two of cold steel, adroitly delivered beneath the surface, induced him to release the hunter, who, however, was now pounced upon by several of the Indians, and despite his Herculean struggles and vicious thrusts, was speedily choked into submission, and then hauled into one of the canoes, senseless and a captive.

The remaining swimmers were quickly picked up, and then the fact of the other fugitive having been either killed or stunned became generally known, creating considerable dissatisfaction. Hoping still to recover his body, and even were he dead to secure his scalp as a trophy, the canoes separated and began a careful examination of the river.

Several bodies were picked up, but they were all Indians, who had fallen as the price of victory. The larger pieces of the broken canoe, such as had not sunk at once, were examined and turned over, but without revealing the desired object.

The missing scout was not to be found. Then they darted rapidly down the river, after a floating mass of drift-wood, thinking that Shafer had possibly sought refuge there.

The savage who sat in the stern of the hindmost canoe, made an ineffectual clutch at the blade of a broken paddle as they swept by it, but then seeing that nothing was left of it but the spoon-shaped blade, gave it no further thought. And then gaining the pile of drift, the boats separated and began a careful and thorough search.

Several of the savages dove and felt carefully all beneath the heap of logs and brushwood, but in vain. The body of their missing foe was not there, and reluctantly they were forced to the conclusion that the blow had proved fatal, and that the body had sunk at once to the bottom of the river, where it would remain to furnish food for the fishes, scalp and all.

And then they turned their faces toward the western bank of the river, where their comrades awaited them, having witnessed the struggle in the water with feelings of intense fury and deepest excitement. Landing, the half unconscious form of Uriah Barham was rudely pushed up the bank, and cast heavily upon the ground.

As the dead Indians were brought up from the boats, the grief and anger of the Kickapoos was fearfully deep and bitter, and had they not held Aneola and the chief, High Lance, in such fear and reverence, the scout would have been sacrificed then and there. But their spite was restrained to merely kicking and beating the white captive, and anticipating great pleasure in torturing him when bound to the stake, as they doubted not would be the doom of the hunter, when he reached the village.

Still half senseless, Uriah's arms were bound, and a flexible grape-vine twisted by one end around his neck, while the other was held by a brawny savage, and thus forced to precede the party through the woods, taking a direct course for

the Indian town, as nearly as the formation of the ground would admit.

Did he falter, a brutal kick, or the prick of a knife-point urged him on ; or did he chance to stumble forward, a vigorous jerk upon the grape-vine halter would bring him up, all standing.

CHAPTER VII

AN ASTOUNDING DECLARATION.

As the last one of the Kickapoos disappeared through the forest-trees in pursuit of the two daring scouts, Aneola turned once more toward the still motionless form of the chief, Red Iron. He had not yet stirred from the spot where the terrific blow of Peter Shafer's fist had hurled him, all in a heap.

As the forest maiden stood leaning upon the muzzle of her light rifle, gazing upon the swollen and disfigured countenance of her red-skinned lover, there was a strangely contradictory expression upon her features. There were anger, contempt, alarm, wonder, pleasure and exultant joy all combined.

What her thoughts were, we, of course, have no means of knowing, but more than once she half-unconsciously touched her lips with the tips of her fingers, and then glanced hurriedly around her, with deeply-flushing cheek and lustrous eyes, that glowed with a soft, yet burning light.

That her thoughts were not fixed upon Red Iron soon became evident, for as that worthy gave a sudden gasp and started to a sitting posture, Aneola half turned to flee, as if in alarm. But then learning the cause, she once more paused and resumed her attitude.

The head of the young chief seemed to be by no means the most clear, and he gazed around him with a comical air of wonderment, while one hand instinctively sought the large and sensitive lump that marked the spot where Shafer's hard bony knuckles had alighted. Then the truth appeared to flash upon his mind, and he sprung to his feet, glaring around him as if seeking his foe.

"The chief need not look—they have gone long since," coldly spoke Aneola.

"Gone—where?"

"Off toward the river. The Kickapoo braves are upon their trail; I showed them the way."

"Red Iron will go too. He will not rest or sleep until the scalp of the white dog, who dared to strike a chief, hangs at his girdle! Where is my gun?" angrily cried the Indian.

"It is gone too," laughed the maiden; then with a sudden change she added, in a cold, stern voice: "Let the chief go, and if he is cunning and brave enough, let him bring in the white hunter; but let him heed the words of Aneola, the chieftain's daughter. If Red Iron dares to harm one hair of the dark-eyed hunter's head, before he brings him to High Lance, the young chief shall die like a dog! My will is law to High Lance, but if he will not make my word good, then my own hand shall! Let Red Iron remember; Aneola has spoken, and the Great Spirit has witnessed her words."

"If he can, the Kickapoo will bring them in prisoners, but if not, then he will take their scalps. The idle words of a squaw shall not make him a coward!" bitterly retorted the savage, and then with one quick glance around him, he started off at headlong speed along the broad trail.

Aneola threw up her rifle, and the double sights bore full between the broad shoulders of the Indian, and her blue eyes flashed angrily along the clouded tube; but then the weapon was lowered without being discharged. A bitter, scornful gleam shot athwart her features, that boded ill for any hopes that Red Iron might entertain of winning her for a bride, and then she slowly proceeded toward the village.

As she entered the open plain, a crowd of women and children flocked to meet her, and she was overwhelmed with queries as to what had really occurred. But the chieftain's daughter did not reply, and haughtily waving them aside, passed hastily along to the almost deserted collection of houses.

At the outskirts she was met by a tall, dusky-complexioned woman whose features betrayed the presence of Caucasian blood. She was still comely, though considerably beyond middle age, for her luxuriant brown hair, still soft and glossy,

was thickly threaded with silver, and a few wrinkles showed upon her face.

It needed but one glance to show that in her more youthful days this woman had been almost peerlessly beautiful, and of a superb form, that, even now, was magnificently symmetrical. This was Still Water, the wife of High Lance, and the one who had been a mother to Aneola.

"What has happened, daughter?" she uttered, in remarkably pure English. "You are excited, and there is blood upon your dress."

"Wait, mother; I will tell you all soon. I must see father first. He did not go out with the braves; then where is he?"

"In the lodge. Come with me."

In a few moments the two women paused before a large skin tent, and, in answer to the call of Still Water, a deep, sonorous voice bade them enter. They did so, and stood before High Lance, who half-reclined upon a pallet of skins, smoking his pipe. There was but little of the usual savage ceremony used between this family, when they were alone, and Aneola began:

"Father, you heard the cry of the young chief, Red Iron?"

"Yes."

"It was called forth by the sight of two white hunters. I will speak plain, and hope that you will not be angry with your child. I was in the woods, and a pale-face came up and spoke to me. He was unarmed, and trusted in my honor not to betray him. I gave my word for the time, but told him afterward we must be enemies. We were still speaking when Red Iron came up.

"He tried to take the life of the unarmed brave, and I bade him forbear. Could I allow him to dishonor my word? The pledge of the daughter of High Lance? I told him to give the stranger an hour, and then take his trail, but he said no; that he would have his scalp then. He was about to strike him down like a dog, when another pale-face came out and felled him to the ground with his naked hand. But Red Iron cried out, and when the warriors came to assist him, I showed them the trail left by the white men, and bade them bring them in alive. Did I do right?"

"In protecting the white man, yes ; after giving him your pledge. But you should not have given it. You should either have shot him or else brought him in a prisoner. Have you forgotten what the Long-knives have done ? And perhaps these very men are the ones who killed my braves."

"I do not know. If they did you can punish them. But may I ask a favor ?"

The aged chief merely nodded assent ; but there was an uneasy look in the still bright and keen eyes that he fixed upon the rarely-beautiful face of his adopted child.

"Then I have your word—the word of a chief that was never broken ! I ask you not to pass judgment upon these men, if they are brought in captive, for two days and nights. To resist the hot words of Red Iron and the rest, and to keep their lives safe for that long."

"It shall be as Aneola wishes. But she must not ask for more. If these pale-faces are the men who fought my warriors at the Long Hill, they must die the death ! The spirits of the dead warriors would not rest in their graves were they not avenged," sternly replied High Lance.

"Aneola only asks this, and that they may have the choice always given to brave captives ; either to become an Indian or to die."

The Kickapoo sachem did not reply other than by waving his hand for the women to go and leave him alone. Highly pleased at having even thus far succeeded in her purpose, Aneola accompanied Still Water to her own tent.

The enraged chief, Red Iron, dashed madly along the open trail, hoping to overtake his comrades in time to participate in the capture of the daring pale-faces, but he had miscalculated the time that had elapsed while he remained insensible, and the long start the chase had of him. He could hear the faint yells far off, but despite the almost incredible speed at which he ran, he reached the river-bank too late to take part in the aquatic contest.

Not knowing whether the fugitives had been killed, captured or had effected their escape, Red Iron resolved to follow up the trail of the Kickapoos as the most speedy way of learning the truth. But despite his haste, the returning party were nearly at the village before he overtook them.

The joy of the savage may be imagined as he perceived that the man who had been the cause of such a bitter affront being put upon him by the maiden, whom he loved so madly, was a helpless captive; and this feeling was still further enhanced at learning that the pale-face who had disgraced him with an unrequited blow was dead; lying at the bottom of the Wabash, food for fishes.

Red Iron strode up alongside the captive, and gazed malignantly into his face. As the latter recognized his battered features, a slight smile involuntarily curled his lip, and a look of scornful contempt shot athwart his face.

"Red Iron meets um pale-face 'gin, eh?" triumphantly uttered the savage, in broken English.

"Pouf! the air stinks in my nostrils! I see a dog whose home is with the polecats. Ugh! I spit upon him!" replied Barham, in a biting tone of contempt, using the savage dialect.

Red Iron scowled vindictively and nervously clutched his knife-hilt, but then with an effort he subdued his rising passion and abruptly turned away, evidently fearing to trust himself within hearing of the prisoner's keen tongue, lest he should slay him at sight. And then the *cortege* pressed on.

As the Indians reached the plain upon which stood the village, they closed in around their captive, as if to guard against any attempt upon his part to escape, but in reality it was to protect him from the crowd of yelling, screeching, half-frantic squaws who rushed around them at sight of a prisoner, and but for this precaution, Barham would have been literally torn to pieces by the infuriated hags.

Rudely pushing the squaws and children aside, the warriors finally brought their captive across to the door of a small but substantial log-cabin situated near the center of the town, and opening the heavy door, several of them dragged him inside, and rudely knocking his feet from under him, securely bound Barham hand and foot. Then closing and barring the door, a small but trusty guard was stationed at the entrance, while the others dispersed; Red Iron proceeding alone to the tent of the chief, High Lance.

Entering, he briefly detailed the events of the surprise and

capture, narrating the struggle upon the river as he had learned it, and the death of the tallest pale-face. He also mentioned the loss sustained by them in obeying the commands of Aneola to capture the fugitive alive.

A deep frown settled over the commanding features of the venerable chief, but he did not speak. Seeing this, Red Iron silently withdrew, and after renewing his caution to the guard, at the door of the prison-house, to not allow any one to enter or hold communication with the prisoner, unless either himself or High Lance, he sought his own lodge to bathe his swollen and painful features.

Before long the old chief appeared and motioned the sentinels to open the door and allow him to enter. Then bidding them to move off beyond ear-shot, but still to remain within view of the entrance, he stepped inside, closing the door behind him.

The interior was cheerless enough. The floor was bare, of hardly-pounded earth, that had been exposed to the heat of fire until it was nearly converted into brick. The walls were heavy and substantial, of closely-fitting logs.

The roof was of the same material, while across the top of the building these logs had been set apart, so as to admit light; and in stormy weather the prison must indeed be uncomfortable, as the elements could then pour freely down through the interstices.

Barham was lying helplessly bound upon the cold floor, with his eyes fixed defiantly upon the face of his visitor. He had no difficulty in recognizing him as the aged chief whom he had seen riding beside Aneola, when he first beheld her.

"Can you understand my language—Kickapoo?" at length asked High Lance, in remarkably good English for an Indian, closely eying the captive.

"Yes; I can understand it better than I can speak it," hesitatingly replied the scout; but the instant he had made the admission he regretted it, for it might have proved a valuable secret had he professed ignorance.

"Good! then I will talk it, and you can answer in your own tongue. First, who are you, and what did you seek in the country of the Kickapoos?"

Barham hesitated, but he knew that he would inevitably be

recognized by the survivors of the hill fight, and he might gain credit by being frank, where he could at any rate lose nothing. So he boldly replied :

" I am a white hunter, as you see, and I was about my own business when some of your warriors attacked me."

" You are a chief of the Long-knives ?"

" No, although your men can say whether I know how to fight like one, or not."

" Then you are one of those who killed so many of my braves at the Long Hill, yesterday ?"

" Yes. They fired first at me. They tried to take my scalp ; I tried to save it, and as a matter of course some of them got killed. And I added one or two more to their number, to-day."

" You talk big, but you are young and foolish. Your courage will fly away when you are bound to the stake and the hot fire begins to shrivel your skin ; to make the blood boil in your veins and the marrow to dry up in your bones. Then you will cry and weep tears of blood for mercy," coldly yet malignantly replied High Lance.

" It may be so ; I can not say, as I have never tried that sort of amusement," Barham laughed ; but nevertheless a cold thrill of horror crept over him at this fearful threat. " But if you do see me die that death, you will see the end of a brave man. Is this all you came here to tell me ? If it is, I would just as soon say good-by at once, for I am tired and wish to sleep."

" No, it is not all. Let the pale-faced brave listen well to my words. A chief speaks, and his words should not drop to the ground like rain-drops—to die away and leave no sign. What High Lance says is law, and if you do as he asks, you may still live and go forth from this place as free as air and no one will dare to look black at you. Will you heed my words ?"

" I will listen. If they are such as an honest man may receive, I will promise to give you a straight answer," replied Barham, after a slight pause, half-anticipating the purpose of the chief.

" Listen then, and take heed how you refuse my offer. If you put this chance from you, nothing can save you from

death—and death by fire! You are a brave man, although your skin is white. You are strong, bold and cunning; you are not a true pale face. You should be an Indian. Your heart is Indian now. It is only to color your face, and it is done.

“You are young, and life must be dear and sweet to one in whose veins the blood flows hot and strong. You ought not to die yet; you should live long and leave many sons behind you to emulate the glory and fame of their father. There are many young and tender maidens in my tribe. They would gladly take you for their chief, and you would learn to look upon them kindly and to love them. Then throw off your white skin and become an adopted son of the Kickapoos.”

The old chief paused to note the effect of his appeal, and to allow it time to duly impress the hunter, with all its advantages. He did not for a moment doubt what the answer of his captive would be; he felt assured that it would be quickly accepted. But he was in error.

Barham hesitated before replying; not that he had the slightest idea of accepting the offer, but he thought that it might possibly be turned to some advantage. Might he not thus secure a respite, during which he could effect his escape?

And then he thought of Aneola. He felt that she had become deeply interested in him, and might she not afford him help? These thoughts flashed rapidly through the mind of the captive, and he replied, slowly:

“The words of the chief sound well, and there is much truth in them. But I am white. I can not decide to turn red all at once. It needs time to change my heart. I must think well before I speak. Will the chief grant me this time?”

“High Lance has given his word that the pale-face should live yet for two suns. He may have until then to think. Then he must answer, and if he accepts, all is well. If not—then he will die at the stake.”

“That will be long enough. Come here then and I will give you my answer—if I *am* here, then,” added Barham, muttering the last words beneath his breath, as the aged sachem turned to leave the hut.

Suddenly pausing, High Lance returned and severed the bonds that secured the young ranger, saying:

"Now you can think better," and then left the building, securing the door as before.

The meditations of the scout were not of the most agreeable nature, when he was once more left alone in his gloomy prison. So dejected was he that he did not arise, though his limbs were free, but bowed his head upon his hands, and gave way to his long pent-up feelings.

As the old Kickapoo had said, life was sweet, very sweet to him; seemingly the more so by the dread fate that awaited his decision. It was terrible to think of being cut off in his very prime, forced to bid adieu to this life and all its joys.

And then he thought of Myra Mordaunt. He thought of how she loved him, and how her very life seemed wrapped up in his well-being; and even there, in solitary gloom, a deep flush of shame suffused his cheek, as he realized how small a place she had occupied in his thoughts since his first beholding this Aneola; this beautifully bewitching forest maid. But now that he was in trouble, Barham felt that he loved sincerely, only Myra; that the other was merely a sentiment of admiration, far removed from love.

And still sadder thoughts were assailing him; causing his strong frame to shudder, and a tear to dim the brightening of his eye. He recalled the dreadful fate of his brother scout, Peter Shafer.

Raised together from childhood, sharing each other's pleasures and joys, perils and privations, they had often fought together, only to make peace and become still firmer friends. Together they had learned to swim; to hunt and to trap, and of later days to trail their red-skinned foes, and to fight them with their own weapons.

And now poor Peter was dead—slain almost as by his friend's own hand. Had he not been so obstinate in his foolhardy project, poor Shafer would have been still alive.

Fortunately for Barham, he was aroused from this painful reverie by the sound of voices at the door of the cabin, and he raised his head with a quick motion. He could distinguish the clear, mellow voice of the forest maiden, Aneola, in apparent dispute with the guard.

Then there came a rattling at the bars, and the door swung open. The young scout sprang to his feet, with the half-

settled determination of making a bold dash through the open doorway for freedom; but the brawny forms of half a dozen warriors were ranged around it, as if in anticipation of some such demonstration.

In the doorway stood the lithe, agile form of Aneola, her cheek flushed and her eyes sparkling with a strange luster. Then ordering the door to be closed, she advanced toward the young man with extended hand.

"You see—we meet again, sooner than either of us expected, and I offer you the hand—not of enmity, but of friendship."

"And I gladly accept it, for God knows I stand in need of friends, now, if ever!" replied Uriah, warmly clasping her hand between both his broad palms.

"You have one—I might almost say two, for my father, the chief, is favorably impressed with you, and will stand your friend, if you only allow him. He made you an offer?"

"Yes. Freedom and a wife, if I would deny my race and color and become an Indian," bitterly responded Barham, dropping her hand, and turning away.

"A wife?" and had not the twilight within been so deep, a peculiar glitter from her eyes would have told how this word had affected Aneola.

"Yes; he said there were many dark-skinned maidens who would look gladly upon my suit. An *Indian* wife—for me!" and he laughed scornfully.

"But *all* are not red—there is one—" faltered the forest maiden; then as Barham turned toward her with a wondering start, she added, in a low, rapid tone, as if fearing to allow herself time for reflection.

"Listen, while I tell you a little story. There was a maiden once who lived with the Indians. She had been reared with them from an infant. And as she grew up, she became more beautiful and attractive; at least so said those around her. Many brave warriors and chiefs came to woo her, but none of these could win her heart. She respected them, but that was all; and they went away, saying that she had no heart.

"This girl only laughed and went on as before, happy and free as the wild deer. But she had a heart, as she soon learned; and then she first knew what it was to love: She met a stranger, a man with a pale face, but she could not

look upon him as an enemy. She thought to herself that in this man she had met her master. That in him she would either find her life or her death. Then danger came and he fled; but first he pressed his lips to hers, and stole the first kiss that had been ever given to man by her.

"She felt as if her heart had been torn from her bosom; that she would never more be happy. He would not again return, but would wander on and forget that he had ever met her. But she set her friends upon his track; bade them fetch him back, but not to harm a hair of his head upon peril of death.

"He *was* captured and brought to the place where she lived. But it was only to be doomed to a death by fire. This girl pleaded for him, and then the great sachem told her that if the white hunter would consent to join the tribe—to become one of them and to marry one of their women, that his life should be saved. She went and told him these words, and his answer was—what?"

As she abruptly concluded, Aneola covered her burning face with her hands, and tremblingly awaited the answer of the astounded scout.

For some moments Barham stood as if petrified, not knowing what to say or to think. It had come upon him so unexpected. Still he could not affect to misunderstand her meaning.

"Aneola, is this true?" he at length asked, approaching the maiden and gently taking her hands from before her face.

"It is," she replied, lifting her glorious eyes to his troubled countenance, with a steady look.

"I am sorry—very sorry; but this can never be. I can never love you like that. I feel a strange trembling sensation at my heart whenever I look upon you, but I know it is not love—at least not such love as one should feel for the one he wishes to make his wife. You must forget all this, my poor girl; besides you may—nay, you *must* be mistaken. It is too sudden to last. Think, you never met me before to-day."

"That is long enough. The heart only speaks one language; it never lies," slowly replied Aneola, drawing nearer to the form of the puzzled scout.

"You must struggle with it then, and kill this feeling. I am a white man, and I can not change my color. Besides, I have left one at my home, who has my heart. I love her, and we were to have been married when the snow falls again."

"But she does not love you as I do. She *can not*, or she would never have let you come here among enemies, to meet your death. If she loved you, she could not allow you out of her sight!"

"But I love her," returned Barham, sorely perplexed at this plain language; although, after all, there was a peculiar charm in it that he did not attempt—or care—to analyze.

"Does *she* love you well enough to leave her home, her kindred, her people—all, and come out here to live with the red-skins, for the sake of being with *you*? Then she does not love you as well as I do. Listen, *I* will do this. I will leave those who reared me and cared for me since an infant, and follow you to your own home. I only ask that you love me, for all this!" passionately cried Aneola, her eyes flashing ardently through the tear-drops that had been wrung from her heart by his answer.

"Aneola, I am deeply thankful for this regard—or I should be so, if it were not so painful to me; and you—but I can not accept it. Dearly as I love life, I could not accept freedom at the price of dishonor," firmly replied the young ranger, drawing back.

"Then you refuse?"

"I must."

"Do you know that by one word I could doom you to death within this hour? That I could have you bound to the stake to die a death of torture, by fire?"

"It may be as you say, but I can not change my mind," coldly added Barham.

"Then you shall die!" angrily cried Aneola, as she rushed to the door, which quickly opened, and then closed her from the sight of the doomed scout, who uttered a deep sigh.

CHAPTER VIII.

PETE MAKES A LITTLE VISIT.

MEANWHILE, what had become of Peter Shafer? Was he in reality—as all imagined him to be—lying still and ghastly at the bottom of the Wabash, food for fishes? Or was he—to borrow his own language—“only funnin’?”

We are happy to state that the latter was the case, and that he still lived, although his escape partook somewhat of the marvelous at the time when, having so adroitly made his antagonist change places with him and receive the forcible compliments intended for himself, he had received a forcible blow from the handle of the same paddle.

Now, fortunately for himself, Pete possessed a head capable of withstanding a good many hard knocks, else he would have never lived so long as he had. In youth, he had often been called a “blockhead,” and this peculiarity had not diminished with ensuing years.

The paddle broke close off at the Indian’s hand, and as Pete sunk beneath the muddy surface, half stunned by the blow, he threw up his hands. As they touched the blade of the paddle, he instinctively clutched it desperately, at the same time dropping his knife.

Shafer quickly recovered his senses and then arose to the surface of the water. Fortunately he floated down past a portion of the wrecked canoe, and while it concealed his head from view, he could see enough to convince him that his comrade was either dead or captured, and that to return would only insure the same fate for himself.

For the first time, Pete noted what it was he held in his hand. It was the blade of the paddle, as said, and chanced to be one of those *spoon-shaped* implements, sometimes used in order to secure a better hold upon the water.

One side of it was slightly concave; the middle being perhaps a couple of inches deeper than the edges. And in it, Shafer’s ready wit beheld a hope of escape from his foes, who

he knew would inevitably institute a close search for his body.

He had no time to lose, for the quest could not long be delayed, and he resolved to try a perilous *ruse*. Allowing his feet to drop almost perpendicularly beneath him, and turning upon his back, Pete sunk beneath the turbid surface, until only his nose appeared above the water, like the fin of some queer fish.

Then he placed the paddle—concave side down—directly over this organ, steadying it by means of a bent splinter at the further extremity.

Fortunately the river was tranquil, and by considerable exertion, using his free hand and feet, the scout could maintain his position and breathe with ease. Contenting himself with inhaling a long breath, and retaining it as long as possible, Pete managed to keep from drawing in enough water to strangle him, and was already chuckling heartily at the success of his ruse, when he heard the rapidly-approaching sound of paddles.

He feared that he had been discovered, and that all was over, but still he maintained his position. Scarcely had he drawn in another breath, when a dark shadow appeared to flit past him, and the rippling waves dashed over his nasal organ, almost washing the paddle to one side.

Almost instantly another shadow approached, this time still closer, and to his dismay, the scout beheld what seemed to be some huge clumsy giant's paw, grasp through the water at him! So close did it come to his face, that Pete involuntarily winked, lest his eyes should be touched; but then it vanished, just in time, for Shafer could no longer retain his breath, which escaped like the spouting of a miniature whale.

But the Indian canoes had by this time passed him, in order to search the pile of driftwood. Pete heard their yells of anticipation; and could not resist the impulse to learn what was their import, and cautiously he raised his head until he could see them.

One glance told him how matters stood, and then he sunk down again, gradually edging toward the left bank, so as to escape having to meet the savages again, should they return up the river. But this they did not do, as we have seen.

Gathering boldness from his success, thus far, Pete impelled his novel shield more rapidly toward the shore, and after not a little trouble, and several fits of strangling, he found that he could touch bottom with his feet. Then he cautiously raised his head to take another survey of the field of battle.

Upon the western side, far above him, he could discern the party of Kickapoos just entering the forest, but look keenly as he might, he could see no traces of Barham. Whether his loved comrade was dead or alive, Pete could not tell, but he feared the worst.

Still, he could not remain there, brooding over the misfortune; he must set to work, and the first move was to gain a place of comparative safety for himself, as he was well-nigh exhausted by his exertions. Not caring to land just there, Pete began descending the river, as before.

He found that he had struck upon a small sand-bar, that terminating, left him once more in deep water. Thus he floated down-stream for a while, when he drew up beneath a mass of grape-vines that hung low down over the bank, almost touching the water.

Climbing out on a little shelf-like point of earth, Pete began wringing the water out of his saturated garments.

"Now ain't this a durned purty fix fer a feller like me to be inter, I guess *not*? Pete, you corn-twisted dunder-headed fool you, ain't ye ashamed o' yerself? Ef you ain't, then 'tain't 'ca'se ye hedn't orter be. Go an' let that 'Riah git—Thunder, I cain't say *that*, durned ef I kin! Pore feller—*cuss* the water, how it gits inter a feller's eyes, anyhow!" muttered the scout, rubbing one hand across his face to hide the tears that dimmed his eyes.

At the thought of the probable fate of his loved comrade, the rough hunter could not repress his feelings. After striving in vain for some moments, he broke down, and bowing his head upon his hands, wept bitterly.

It was an affecting tribute to the one that he believed dead; these tears that he would never have shed for himself. It told how deep and strong had been the bond of love that connected those two men, so dissimilar in nature and thoughts.

But Pete could not long remain thus despondent. Accustomed to look upon the bright side of every thing, he soon

began to hope that the truth was not so bad as he had at first feared, and characteristically he at length believed that which he so deeply wished.

"Pete, you old rip you, I do railly b'lieve that you've gone crazy, or else that 'ere rap you got has softened your head. Now what's the use o' your snivelin' like that? 'Riah ain't dead—dog-gone it all, he *shain't* be dead! Ef he'd bin fool enough for that, wouldn't he 'a' told ye, so't you could gone along? Lord, ef that 'ere critter 'd sot off on sech a long trip as that alone, he'd lose his way afore he got a mile—he would *that*!

"Then ef he ain't dead, why he's—whar? A pris'ner, *in* course. An' what must I do? Git him out ef I hev to take an' sift the hull teetotal dog-goned kentry through my old hat! I'll do it—see ef I don't, now! Hello, that don't feel very nice," he muttered, as a small portion of the bank above fell upon his head and sifted down his back. "Guess I'd best git out o' here afore the hull instertution caves in atop o' me."

Grasping the grape-vines, Pete drew himself up to the level of the bank, and took a careful survey of the woods. Seeing nothing to alarm him, he moved off from the bank, adroitly obliterating all traces of his passage for some yards, when he grasped hold of a low, hanging limb and nimbly drew himself up into the body of a tree.

The branches were numerous and the foliage dense, and Pete knew that there was not much danger of his being discovered, even did an enemy chance to pass by that way. Selecting a seat, he composed himself in as comfortable an attitude as circumstances would admit.

For some minutes Shafer sat in silence, his lank jaws working vigorously upon a huge mouthful of tobacco, since prudence denied him the luxury of smoking, and then his whole thoughts were turned upon what should be his future course. By this time he had fully convinced himself that his brother-scout was *not* dead, but only a prisoner in the hands of the Kickapoos.

"Now thar's one thing sartain—which is 'bout the only thing that is so, as *I* can see," he muttered, in a barely audible tone, as was his habit when alone and engaged in solving some difficult problem. "An' that is I must try to git

'Riah el'ar from them 'ere pesky red-skins. But *how*; that's the diffikilty. Le's take it fust end fust, an' then fix it all as we go 'long." And he did "reason" it, in his own whimsical way, full two hours, when he broke forth:

"Wal, that's all—fur's I kin see now. I must run the resk an' trust to luck. But I'll 'ither git him free, or go under 'longside o' him, ef I die fer it! So thar, now, what ye got to say to *that*—eh?" and with this apostrophe to his imaginary auditor, Pete again relapsed into silence.

Time fled on, and as the sun set, the long-limbed scout descended from his uncomfortable perch, and struck through the forest, up the river. His senses were fully upon the alert, and it was evident that he by no means underrated the task that lay before him.

Pete exercised an unusual degree of caution. He was wholly unarmed, save with his tomahawk, and was in no condition to sustain a fight for life.

He kept close along the shore, although keeping under cover, lest any prying eyes should be upon the watch from the opposite shore, and keenly scanned the river and forest. Finally Shafer believed that he recognized the point from which he had plunged into the water, and after ascending a little further, to allow for his falling down-stream with the current, he entered the water and struck out boldly but silently for the western bank of the Wabash.

Keeping low down upon the surface, he did not much fear discovery, even should there be enemies near, and rapidly neared the shore. He paused upon touching bottom, and listened for a minute with painfully-strained hearing.

Then he lightly scaled the bank and lay prostrate upon its edge. With a keen glance around him, the scout began gliding through the woods, seeing that he was upon the trail left by the chase some hours previously.

Pete's calculations proved correct, for he soon reached the clump of bushes that had received the castaway rifles into its friendly care, and clutched them with a half-suppressed cry of exultation. Shafer felt himself, once more, as he fondled his trusty rifle, and slung that of Barham—or rather Red Iron's—across his back by the suspended strap.

Then with a greatly lightened heart Pete struck out to-

ward the Kickapoo village, and at the end of an hour he knew that he must be near it, and therefore proceeded more slowly, until, finally, he paused upon the edge of the forest and gazed eagerly out upon the Indian village. He could see more than one dusky form flitting silently to and fro, or else plainly defined against the ruddy glow of the huge fires that were blazing in the center of the open space around which the row of lodges had been built. And Pete knew that it would be rank folly to dream of pursuing his search for Uriah until a late hour, when all save the customary sentinels should have retired to rest.

So, turning, Pete strode rapidly toward the range of hills, intending to await the proper moment for action in the hill arbor, so fortunately discovered by Barham. Deeply absorbed in troubled thoughts, Shafer forgot to exercise his usual caution, and more than one twig snapped sharply beneath his feet or rustling leaves fluttered loudly.

Then as he stumbled over a scrubby bush, almost falling headlong to the ground, Pete became aroused from his reverie, and glanced keenly around him. He saw nothing to awaken his suspicions, and then he pressed forward with more circumspection.

Now the velvet-pawed panther could not have passed along with less noise than did the long, ungainly scout; but his precaution came too late. The harm was already done!

Behind him glided stealthily a dark, shadowy figure that could scarcely be told from the bushes and shrubs, so silently cautious was its progress. There was a deadly foe upon the track of the ranger, who pushed on unsuspecting, and elated with the hope of rescuing his friend.

Pete crossed the creek and cautiously scaled the hill, occasionally casting a backward glance, not along his trail, but toward the village. And then he gained the little shelf of rock behind the leafy screen, and sat down to recover the breath he had lost by the rapid ascent.

And the darkly silent and sinister shadow crept on and upward until it paused and closely hugged the ground just beneath the spot where the scout was sitting, so close that a rifle could have connected their extended hands.

"Wonder what 'Riah thinks 'bout his 'speriment *now*? Bet

a cookie he don't run a'ter no more strange gals like this 'ere one. Dog-gone him, *I* knowed jest how 'twould be, an' *I* told him so, the pesky joskin! But this 'ere gal-spook 'll mus tardize him inter marryin' her yit; and then what'll *I* do? What'll Miry say when *I* hev to tell her that her sweetheart has gone an' went an' did it with a pesky white Injun? Durned ef *I* tell her; 'ca'se why: *I* won't let him marry this 'un, *nohow*, so thar!

"Le' me see: my dream said *he* was to git into hot water—which means to git married. Then *I* was to lose my britches which means the same thing, only more so. Now a'ter that kin *I* go down thar so's to gi'n her a chaine to snipe me in *that* a-way? *I* hev to—durn that 'Riah! Won't *I* larrup him when *I* cotch him alone, fer this trick? Ef *I* won't, then it don't matter!"

Gradually Pete's muttering died away, and he sat in motionless silence, gazing out upon the Indian village, deeply absorbed in maturing the details of a plan that had occurred to him, which gave strong hope of enabling him to rescue his comrade before the dawn of another day. And then the moments flew rapidly by.

The dark, shadowy form had heard enough to satisfy him of the hunter's identity, and then began to cautiously move away from the spot. But he had no intention of retreating for good.

Brave and self-confident, he had resolved to capture the white man alone and unaided. It would be a great triumph for him could he march in the scout alive; a fear that was well worth the risk of attempting it.

So, like a veritable shadow, more than solid flesh and blood, he glided around the covert of the pale-face and gained the top, from where he could peer down upon his foe, as he sat there unconscious of the impending danger. Through a little parting in the leafy screen, the savage noted the exact position of Pete.

Laying aside his rifle, the red-skin rose up, and boldly leaped down upon his foe, through the bushes. True to his intention, he alighted with crushing force full upon the shoulders of Shafer, dashing him face downward upon the rocky bench.

Then with an exultant snarl, the Indian clutched his foe by

the throat with a grip of iron. Half stunned and thoroughly bewildered at the sudden and unexpected attack, Pete could offer but a faint resistance.

The pressure grew more deadly upon his throat, and then all around him grew dark and his muscles relaxed. He had lost all consciousness.

Slowly and gradually the Kickapoo chief—for it was indeed Red Iron that had captured the scout—loosened his grasp, as if fearful that his foe was only shamming; but then once fairly convinced that he was conquered, the savage arose and proceeded to bind the arms and feet of his captive. The bonds upon the latter he left comparatively loose, and then sat down to await the revival of the pale-face.

This came soon, and Pete essayed to arise, but fell back again, helpless. He did not speak; he was so thoroughly ashamed of himself, for having been caught napping and conquered by *one* red-skin, that he could not utter a word.

Red Iron jerked him rudely to his feet, and pushing him to the edge of the shelf, adroitly lowered him to the ground below. Then following him, Red Iron led his captive down the hill and out upon the plain.

His triumphant yell aroused the inhabitants, who were extravagantly pleased at the arrival of a second captive, but the young chief strode through them in silence, and reaching the log-cabin where Barham was confined, opened the door and pushed Pete rudely inside.

Stumbling, Pete fell headlong against Uriah, who, catching him in his arms, instantly recognized his mourned comrade.

“My God! Pete, you alive—and here!”

“Yes; seems so. Thought I’d come an’ make you a little visit, jest fer fun.”

CHAPTER IX.

PETE TAKES A NOVEL RIDE.

SUCH was the greeting between the two friends, and then when Pete had related the manner of his escape upon the river, with sundry embellishments, Uriah asked :

"But how did you chance to fall into the hands of that devil, Pete?"

"Fall inter *his* hands? I didn't—he fell inter *mine*; leastways, *some*thin' did. You see I was a-settin' in that leetle hidin'-place what you found, a-tryin' to think up a plan fer to git you out o' here. I don't know how the reds found me out—smelt me, mebbe, drat 'em!—but they did. You 'member that big rock jest above the nest? purty nigh's big as this shanty?"

"Wal, sir, they jest tuck an' rolled that *condemned* rock right over an' tumbled it down on top o' my shoulders. It sorter s'prised me at fust, it kem so onexpectedly, but I soon got over that, an' as the reds kem a squallin' 'round me, I jest riz up with that 'ere stun in my arms, an' gittin' 'em all in a row, I let drive with it an' squshed forty—"

"Pete!"

"Eh? was I lyin' ag'in?" uttered Shafer, in a tone of innocent surprise. "Wal, wal, it does git me how them 'ere pesky things do git together in a string an' then slide out 'twixt my teeth, unbeknownst to me, all eend to eend, jest as though they was the honest truth. It does, actilly!"

Barham finally succeeded in getting a tolerably straight story from Pete, and then recounted his own experience. When he narrated the last interview with Aneola, Pete broke out, lugubriously :

"I knowed it! I told ye so, durn ye, but you wouldn't b'lieve me. *You* knowed better, *you* did, an' now jest see what a pesky corn-spluttered predicklement you've got us both inter! As fer *me*, I don't keer a cuse, 'ca'se whenever I git tired, why I'll jest up an' walk off with this 'ere pigpen atop o' my shoulders; but you—I tell you, 'Riah, that my

dream *did* mean somethin', a'ter all! That pesky critter 'll marry you spite o' fate, now you mind *me*! She's bound to do it, I tell ye."

"But what do you advise, Pete?" anxiously asked Uriah, trying in vain to perceive a glimmer of hope for the future.

"You won't git mad an kick me through the side o' the shanty ef I give you *my* advice?"

"No, why should I?"

"Then lis'en. This 'ere gal-spook—or *is* she one o' them thugs? You'd orter knew, seein' as you tasted her once. Lord, 'Riah, how I did trimmle then fer fear she'd up an' fly away with you like she did all o' my men when I was cap'n in the—"

"Come, Pete, do try and have a little common sense. This is no time for any such tom-fooling," impatiently interrupted the young ranger.

"Jest so. 'Spects I was lyin' ag'in, wasn't I? Now whenever you cotch me at it, ag'in, jist giv' me a punch in the short ribs. But don't hit *too* pesky hard. Wal, as I was a-sayin', this 'ere critter is in love with you—durned poor taste *she's* got, anyhow, to choose you a'ter seein' *me*! *Everybody* knows I'm lots the purtiest an'—Lord! 'Riah, quit! you've broken a dozent o' my ribs a'ready!" spluttered Pete, as he was interrupted by a punch from Barham's fist.

"I wasn't a-lyin'—Lucy al'ays said 'at I was the purtiest, anyhow, an' I guess *she'd* orter know. But that ain't this. She wants to marry you, an' says that ef you don't let her she'll do you up brown; otherwise 'll make a bleezin' light o' you to sarve as a warnin' to all other soft-headed fellers what keeps a-follerin' her 'round the kentry, like *you* did, durn ye!

"There ain't no priest nor pa'son here, so I say marry her. It'll save your life, 'tany rate, an' then when they git kinder keerless an' don't watch you so cluss, jest take a long far'well, 'thout the *far'well*, an' mosey fer home. Then you kin be happy yit with Miry, an' she need never be no wiser. Them's *my* senterments, anyhow," concluded Pete.

"No, I will not do that, Pete," firmly responded Barham. "If I can not escape without such a course, then I will await the worst. They can only kill me, anyhow."

"Yas, an' *that* ain't nothin', when you onc't git used to it. Why, the fust time I was killed—hold on—I won't say it!" cried Shafer, as he saw his comrade about to interrupt him; and then after some further conversation together, the two captives laid down together and sought forgetfulness of their troubles in sleep.

They were aroused the next morning by the entrance of High Lance, who after closely scrutinizing Shafer, bade them arise and follow him. Knowing the folly of attempted resistance, the two scouts obeyed him with anxious minds and rapidly-beating hearts.

The sight that met their gaze was by no means the most reassuring. A double row of Indians drawn up facing each other, all armed with some weapon, which they brandished in huge delight as if in anticipation of a rich treat. Their ranks extended across the open square, the further end terminating not far from the door of a lodge somewhat larger than the others.

There could be only one reading to this exhibition. One or both of the prisoners were *doomed to run the gantlet!*

"The white brave's legs are long," began High Lance, speaking in English to Pete, "and he should be able to run fast, like the wolf-chased deer. Does he see yonder lodge at the further end of the line? Let him reach that, and his life is safe for another sun."

"Ef I reach that, you say I may go free about my own business?" quickly responded Pete.

"No; the white-skin must die, for it was he that killed so many of my braves. But he may have until to-morrow to make his peace with the Great Spirit of the Long-knives."

"Then you're goin' to make a sizzle o' me *anyhow*, whether I git thar or not, be ye? Then durned ef you cain't begin now, to onc't, forthwith, an' not wait no longer, fer hope may die ef I don't sp'ile *this* leetle game, anyway!" declared Pete, firmly, as he deliberately sat down upon the ground.

"What does the pale-face mean?" demanded High Lance, his eyes glittering ominously, as he gazed sternly down upon the obstinate scout.

"Just what I say, old mutton-head! *I* ain't a-goin' to run no muck jest to please *you*, durned ef I do! Ef you 'spects

to git me down through that 'ere row, why you'll hev to tote me on your back, fer not a corn-spluttered step'll I take o' my own accord. So thar, now! Jest put *that* in your gob an' chaw on it tell you see how it tastes."

"You shall burn at the stake if you do not obey me!"

"An' so you say I shall ef I *do*--so what's the good o' me a-foolin' that a-way, say? You cain't foolish old Pete, no-how. You don't git up airly enough in the day fer *that*," retorted Shafer, coolly.

For a moment High Lance stood as if perplexed by the unexpected obstinacy of the scout, but then the frown relaxed into a grim smile, and he beckoned to one of his warriors, a huge unwieldy savage, bidding him hoist Pete upon his back and run with him through the lines. A comical expression of dismayed disgust overspread the features of the Indian at this unwelcome order, but he did not dare murmur against it, for right well he knew that the irritable chieftain would not brook such a proceeding.

So he raised the scout upon his broad back and took up his position. A murmur of wondering surprise ran along the lines as they beheld this action, but then the ludicrous idea caused them to break into a half-laugh, as they prepared their weapons for use.

Then the signal was given, and with an angry yell the unfortunate warrior started upon his tangled path. The blows fell thick and heavy, but fortunately for Pete, his *horse* was one of the most unpopular Indians in the village, and fully one-half of the strokes were aimed at him alone, while of those leveled at the rider, Pete managed to elude the majority, by his cunning dodges and adroit suppleness.

At length, when about midway the lines, a heavy blow, directed at Pete, fell with crushing force upon the head of the savage, felling him to the ground, like an ox stricken in the shambles. And then ensued a ludicrous *melée*.

Nothing for a while could be distinguished but twinkling legs, arms and flashing weapons; but then a nimble form extricated itself from the confused mass, and with long, active leaps gained the door of the council-lodge.

It was that of Pete Shafer, who set up a loud shout of triumphant derision.

CHAPTER X.

BARHAM CLAIMS A WIFE.

THE taunting cry of the scout served to restore a degree of order to the scrambling mass of savages, and they ceased pummeling each other in their blind fury, and separated. As they discovered how they had been outwitted, not a few of them uttered exclamations of admiration, but there were others who had probably been more severely handled during the *melée*, who uttered cries of rage and anger, and sprung with brandished weapons toward the panting scout, who leaned against the door-pole.

But a loud, clear voice soared above theirs, and bade them pause. It was that of High Lance, and his influence was shown by the sudden checking of the mob; none of them dared to disobey his commands.

The old chief advanced and stood before Shafer. Presently he spoke:

"The long-legged hunter is very cunning. He would make a good Indian. Let him go and speak with his brother pale-face. What the Kickapoo sachem told him, he tells you."

Pete followed the savage in silence, and not without a good deal of pain, for he had received more than one severe blow, fortunately, however, only from clubs and sticks. Arriving where Barham stood, High Lance spoke to the latter:

"Let the pale-face talk with his brother about what the Kickapoo spoke yesterday. He is safe until to-morrow. As if he becomes an Indian he is safe forever."

The two whites were conducted back to their log-prison, and again locked within its gloomy walls. Barham was the first one to break the silence.

"Come, Pete, let's talk it over as the old rip suggested. What do you say to doing it, any how?"

"Doin' what?"

"Why, joining the tribe—or rather pretending to do so, until we find some way to escape."

"I 'tend to do *that*, but you don't git me no further, you

don't. *I ain't goin' to marry no dog-goned gal-spook, nor git nobody's gre't gran'mother, now I tell ye !*"

"Neither am I. If I can't get away without that, I'll stay and take the worst. Poor girl ! I am really sorry for her. If I had not met Myra I do believe that I could have learned to love this girl. There is a strange fascination about her that draws me to her in spite of myself. I can't understand it !" muttered Uriah, half to himself.

"Lord, man, *I do*. It's jest as *easy* ! She's mustardized you, that's all ; purty soon she'll git you over that slow fire, a-pourin' honey over ye, like it was in my dream. I tell ye, 'Riah, she cain't fool *me*, nohow, nary time," placidly responded Pete ; then, as the door opened, he added, in a low tone :

"Talk o' the— How d'ye do, mum ? Hope I see ye well.—an' all the fambly—how's *they*, too ?" he exclaimed, in a confused tone, as Aneola stood before them.

"Let the dark-eyed hunter listen," the maiden said, totally ignoring the extended hand of Peter, who quickly retreated to the further extremity of the apartment. "Aneola comes to him again. She has slept upon her words, and can talk coldly now. Will the pale-face do as she said ?"

"I can not. My love is another's, and I should be telling a lie did I bid you hope. It can never be," sadly but firmly responded Barham.

"It is well ; the Great Spirit willed it so ! Aneola can see now that she was wrong. She ought not to have loved the white hunter ; or to have plucked it out of her heart when it first spoke. But she can not now. It is there, and while her heart beats it will never change.

"But the bad spirit has left her now, and she will save the pale-face. She will help him to return to the maiden whom he loves. But the eyes of the Kickapoos are sharp and cunning. We must throw dirt in them and blind them until it is too late. Will my *brother* help me ?" added Aneola, her tone low and broken.

"If I can."

"Listen then. We must be like the serpent. They are your enemies, and it is no sin to deceive them. You must talk crooked—"

"That's *my* part," muttered Pete, "*I* do all the lyin' for this firm, *I* do—bet yer life!"

"You must tell them that you will join them and become a Kickapoo. Then you must tell High Lance that you wish to choose a wife from among his people. Then I will step forward and claim you myself—"

"Don't you do it, 'Riah; don't you do no sech a durned thing! You're mustardized a'ready, you *is*, an' now she is a-pourin' on the honey, thick an' heavy!" warningly said Pete.

"Hold your tongue, you fool! And then what?" added Barham, turning from Shafer to the forest maiden.

"You will not be so closely watched then, and I can easily furnish you with arms and horses so that you can flee. After that your life rests with yourself."

"I will do it. I do not think you would deceive me?"

"No, Aneola loves you too deeply for that," was the simple reply.

"When had I best tell the sachem then?"

"Now is the best time. He is in good humor. The trick of the long hunter pleased him much. He will be glad to think that he has gained two such braves, and will grant your request the more readily. Follow me close and do not notice any one who may come near you or speak to you. Leave me to do the talking until you are face to face with High Lance. Come," and Aneola stepped out of the door, followed by the captives.

In a few moments they were at the lodge of the venerable sachem, and Aneola entered without ceremony, followed by her new allies. High Lance glanced up with an air of astonishment, but did not speak.

"Sachem," began Aneola, "I bring you two pale-faces, who wish to become Kickapoos, and to call you their chief. Are they welcome?"

"If they are true, yes. Does my daughter speak your thoughts straight?" he added, addressing Barham.

"Yes. We have thought well and long upon it, and we wish to 'change our skins; our hearts are already red."

"Red as chalk!" murmured Pete.

"It is good!"

"But the great chief said more. He bade me look around me, and choose a wife from among his people."

"He did. Shall I send for some?"

"No. The only one whom I could ever love, is here. I love Aneola, and claim her for a wife. If I can not have *her*, then you can order me to the stake," firmly replied the young ranger.

High Lance looked puzzled, if not angry, but glanced toward the maiden inquiringly, who said, in a low tone:

"Aneola loves the pale faced hunter!"

"It is good. The Great Spirit wills that it should be so. She shall come to your lodge, after you are adopted into the tribe. But you must fast for three suns, first. And the other brave shall take his choice also."

"No hurry, mister, not a durned bit!" exclaimed Pete, nervously. "*Any* time 'll do me. Lord, *I* ain't in no sech a gre't hurry."

"Well," added High Lance, arising, "come with me. I will go and tell my people, that they may welcome their new brothers."

The party emerged into the open square, and as the tidings quickly spread over the village, every soul assembled.

"Children!" began High Lance, a motion of his hand commanding attention. "I give you two more brothers. They are of white skin, but their hearts are red. They see that the Great Spirit intended them for Indians. They will become adopted children of our tribe."

"Their hands are strong, their eyes quick and keen; their hearts are brave and cunning. They will teach their brothers how the Long-knives fight, and then who will be able to stand defiantly before the arms of the Kickapoos? No one!"

"Children! to show that they do not lie, the White Bear and Fox Foot will each take a squaw from among their new sisters. White Bear has already chosen. He has looked with favor upon Aneola, the chieftain's daughter, and she loves him. High Lance is proud to give his child to one who will become such a great warrior and hunter."

"Children! High Lance has spoken. Are his words good?"

For a moment all was silent. Then with an anger-distorted

countenance, the young chief, Red Iron, sprung forward, and confronted the white-haired sachem, his eyes glowing with illy-suppressed fury.

"No—the words of the chief are *not* good! Are the Kickapoos dogs, that these men should slay their warriors and then throw dirt upon the dead? I—Red Iron—say, *no*!

"If the great chief wishes a mate for his child, let him seek for one among his own people. There are many wise and brave men who would gladly take her to their lodge. Red Iron loves her. He asks her for his wife. He loved her long before she met this pale-face. Let High Lance give her to the young chief, and then he will greet the captives as brothers. If not, then—"

"Why does Red Iron pause?" coldly added the sachem; but there was an angry glitter in his eyes that boded no good for the mutinous warrior, who was now thoroughly blinded by his passions.

"He will not. If not—*then the white dogs die!*" shouted Red Iron, as he drew his hatchet and sprung toward the unarmed scouts.

As Red Iron uttered the last words and sprung forward past the sachem, the two rangers leaped apart. Pete thrust out one long leg, and adroitly tripped the savage, causing him to stagger toward Barham.

Then as if by mutual attraction, the head of the savage and the hard fist of the borderer came into violent contact, the result being to hurl the Indian heavily to the ground. Pete was about to add his mite to the punishment, when High Lance sprung forward, and placing one foot upon the breast of the fallen Kickapoo, raised the gleaming tomahawk high above his head to deal the finishing blow.

Red Iron glared ferociously up into the face of the sachem, but there were no signs of fear or submission in his glance. Then High Lance removed his foot and allowed the savage to arise, saying:

"Red Iron is a chief and the son of a chief. He shall not die the death of a dog. The council shall decide his fate."

"No, kill him now, or else let him have revenge. He has been struck by a pale-faced dog—he must have his scalp to wipe out the insult!" hissed the savage, with deadly fury.

"Bah! the Red *Dog* can talk big words, but he dare not fight a *man* who has weapons in his hands. No, he would run away like a whipped cur," retorted Barham, his eye flashing, and his worst passions fully aroused at the treacherous attack.

"Does High Lance hear?" quietly added Red Iron, in a low, deadly tone.

The sachem hesitated, but there arose a general murmur of approval from the assembly, and knowing how popular the young chief was, he did not deem it wise to deny the demand, lest a mutiny should ensue.

"Red Iron's words are good—he shall have his wish. The two warriors shall go out and fight. The one who conquers shall take Aneola to his lodge. It shall be so—High Lance has said it!"

The preliminaries did not consume much time. The weapons were to be rifle, tomahawk and knives. The duelists were to enter the prairie, which was covered with a growth of grass and weeds waist deep. Then at a preconcerted signal they were to drop down under cover, and seek each other's life.

Then the two foes were conducted out upon an almost perfectly level piece of ground, and bade await the signal—a loud whoop from the lips of High Lance. A moment's breathless silence, and then like a clarion note the signal rung out upon the still air.

And now began a series of curious maneuvers, each striving to catch sight of the other, and yet remain under cover himself. For some time this continued, and they had drawn nearer until not a score of yards intervened between the enemies, although each was ignorant of the other's whereabouts.

Red Iron was upon a little knoll, and his keen glance detecting a suspicious rustling among the grass a few yards from him, he fancied that he could distinguish the form of his enemy. Firing at it, he sprung to his feet only to behold the scout rise up in a totally different spot.

Barham uttered a loud, exultant yell, and raised the rifle to his cheek. The trigger was pulled—the hammer fell, but there was a sullen click and tiny shower of sparks. *His rifle had flashed in the pan!*

Red Iron uttered a cry of triumph, and dashed forward with brandished weapons. Barham clubbed his rifle and boldly met the onset. The blows met in mid-air, and the hatchet was hurled from the red-man's hand, and his fingers badly bruised.

Then drawing his knife Barham in turn became the assailant.

For an instant they confront each other, and then they met, raging furiously. Quick thrusts are made and parried. But then growing more careless, blood dims the brightness of the flashing steel.

Blood flows freely, but still they fight on, determined to conquer or to die. They are fighting madly, recklessly—seemingly unconscious of the wounds they are each moment receiving; only intent upon slaying their foe.

Once—twice—thrice they fall to the ground, clasped in each other's arms; but only to arise and fight on with fast-failing strength, but unabated ferocity and determination. Then the gory blade of the young ranger finds the seat of life, and, with a wild yell of death-rage, the tall form of the young chief totters and falls prone upon the ground!

Red Iron was dead!

A faint shout of triumph bursts from the lips of the victor as he stoops over the body of his late foe, and tearing off the reeking scalp, swung the hard-earned trophy over his head.

Then, overcome by the loss of blood, he falls senseless across the dead body of the young chief.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEATH-SONG.

MORE than one weary week rolled by before the young ranger revived sufficiently from the effects of his terrible conflict to arise from his couch. He had suffered mainly from loss of blood, his wounds, though many, being none of them serious.

Still he doubtless owed his life to the assiduous care of

Aneola, who was seldom absent from his side, and then only when forced to take some repose by Shafer. And Peter, also, proved himself at home by the sick bed.

But during that time he had entirely changed his opinion of Aneola, and had there not been already a sweet, loving image enshrined within his heart, he most assuredly would have fallen in love with the "gal-spook," as he still playfully called her. And with his other duties, Pete was adroitly smoothing the way toward an escape, as soon as Barham should have recovered sufficient strength to endure the journey.

He would hunt with the red-skins, closely watched at first, but appeared so zealous and light-hearted that they at length ceased to suspect him. Time and again he could have effected his own escape, but he would not desert his comrade.

But the time came at length when they were to bid adieu to the Indian village. Aneola had secured both horses and arms, during the evening, and as she had given out that the white hunter had been taken worse, no one would be likely to suspect them.

At nearly midnight the trio stole unobserved out of the town, and passing through the defile, soon gained the spot where the horses had been concealed. To the surprise of the white hunters they found *three*, one of them being the pony of the Forest Princess.

"Do not wonder, my brother," said Aneola, with a sad smile. "I am only going with you for a short distance."

"I was in hopes that you had changed your mind, and was going to return to your true people with us."

"No. I could not see you married and happy with *her*. I shall stay and die here, as I have lived, an Indian maiden."

There was no reply to this, and the trio rode on swiftly until the range of hills was reached upon which the two scouts had come so near meeting with a terrible death. Then Aneola paused and indicated a narrow defile.

"See. Yonder lies your road; go. No, do not speak, but only say good-by. I would not hear more."

The sad farewell was spoken, and then the brother scouts rode on. They did not speak. Their hearts were too full of sad and painful thoughts.

The moon had for some time arisen, and was now shining down upon the earth with a clear, luminous light. Suddenly the white men paused. A wild, weird sound assailed their hearing, and their cheeks blanched with horror.

"*'Tis the death-song !*" gasped Barham.

"Looky yander !" echoed Pete, pointing toward the highest pinnacle of the hill.

There, standing upon the parapet of the stone fort, they could plainly distinguish the form of Aneola, the Forest Princess. She was singing the mournful, weird death-song !

The scouts could do naught. Nothing mortal could preserve her from the self-meditated death.

And still the song soared over the intervening space, and tortured the hearts of the hearers.

Then it abruptly ceased. There came one word—a name—**URIAH !**"

Then there could be seen a pair of uplifted hands ; one upturned glance, a leap over the frightful abyss !

A swiftly flitting form, and then all was over !

Her load of grief too heavy to be borne, Aneola had died !

The two scouts did not speak. The same thoughts inspired them both, and turning their horses' heads, they slowly rode toward the base of the cliff. It was a painfully sad task that awaited them.

It was performed in silence, and the ground soon hid from mortal eyes all that remained of the unfortunate maiden.

A silent, heartfelt prayer and the scouts left the tragic spot and resumed their journey homeward.

We need add but little more.

The two rangers passed through the ensuing struggles unharmed and in safety, and then returning home were united to the ones who had awaited so faithfully for their coming.

But though they were happy, many a sad, mournful thought was given to the tragic fate of ANEOLA, THE FOREST PRINCESS.

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